

Pastoral Letter
Of
Terence Patrick Drainey



Bishop of Middlesbrough

Lent 2024

Dear sisters and brothers,

Where would we be without adverts? Our world is peppered with them. Turn but a corner and your eyes are bombarded with them. Flick the switch and your senses are flooded with them. Enter any shopping Mall and your ears are blasted by them. As soon as you get to an interesting part in a TV film or drama, the plot is interrupted by them. They are everywhere! However much you dislike them, however much they might irritate you, you can't help but admire their creators and their promoters. What faith, what passion, what ingenuity drives on the cause! In a nutshell their brief is to demonstrate to everyone how much we need their product; how imperfect, lacking and mediocre our lives would be without it. And finally how easy it is to obtain it. If they can achieve this, then their job is done. They have fulfilled their task in life.

Welcome to Lent everyone. We began our journey on Wednesday last in a dramatic way. As the sign of the cross was imposed on our forehead with ashes we were individually admonished, "Repent and believe in the Gospel"; or "Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return". Both have a ring of finality about them with little room for compromise. We are being informed that something serious and important is happening here. In this particular instance it isn't our favourite "Soap" that is being interrupted by adverts, it is the Church attempting to restore reality to disordered lives in need of the grace of God. What is actually on offer is the gift of salvation and healing. And this isn't just partially guaranteed for a month, three months, or a year, but for eternity, for ever.

The great thing about this particular product is that it is completely free; you don't actually have to pay for it. In fact, you can't pay for it. It can only be given. And when it is accepted and frequently applied it will begin to rid you of the very thing that you have wanted to cure all your life. Yes, if you give this "free offer" your total cooperation it is guaranteed to work in all circumstances. Sin will begin to diminish from the very first application.

Now, what about sin? Does it still exist? Well it is a generic term for all sorts of ailments that affect our lives. Some effects of sin manifest themselves in our personal lives. Sin makes us turn inwards on ourselves. It teaches us to mistrust ourselves; to value ourselves less, even to the point of hating ourselves. Once we have cut ourselves off from the very centre and meaning of our lives, we find ourselves on a downward path. God, living in, and loving us, is the foundation of everything we are. To turn away from this fundamental truth is to enter the world of sin. And the only way back is to accept the free gift of God's healing love.

Other types of sin, as well as damaging our relationship with God directly and damaging ourselves, can also have repercussions on others. Selfishness, greed, lust of all kinds make us regard people as a means, as objects rather than equal creations of God deserving of our respect and love. Thus, sin has a triple destructive effect – on our relationship with God, on our relationship with ourselves and on our relationship with others. We can take it even further when we begin to ponder the creation of the physical world which God has placed into our hands. He told us at the beginning that we were to be stewards of creation, using it responsibly but ensuring that it was managed and protected for future generations. And yet this same selfishness, greed and lust of all kinds have caused us to

almost destroy this great gift. This is the cosmic effects of sin once we deny that God, living in, and loving everything, is the foundation.

With such an important gift on offer without which sin will continue to distort and destroy the whole of creation, including us, would that we had some of the faith, passion and ingenuity that drives the Advertising Industry! How can we demonstrate to everyone the need they have of salvation? How can we show them that without it their lives will be so imperfect, lacking and mediocre? How can we convince them that the gift is available and freely on offer?

Well now, here's our strap-line - **Repent and believe in the Gospel!** We can combine this with St Mark's urgent words in today's Gospel – **The time has come and the Kingdom of God is close at hand.** Then if we take a few phrases from the First Reading and the Prayer Over The People at the end of Mass we should have it in a nutshell:

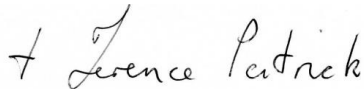
God says, I am establishing a new covenant with you, for the time has come and the Kingdom of God is close at hand so repent and believe in the Gospel, In this way your hope will grow in tribulation, virtue will be strengthened in temptation and your eternal redemption will be assured.

If we believe this and passionately use our ingenuity to tell others then our job will be done and we will have fulfilled our task in life.

So what do you think? Do you believe that God is the Creator, that sin is a reality and salvation is freely on offer to all who are willing to accept it? At least you have the gift of Lent to ponder on all this; you have the sacraments of Eucharist and Reconciliation to help you and the Word of God to guide you.

In words based on the Second Preface of Lent I suggest we “use this sacred time for renewing and purifying our hearts, that freed from disordered affections we may so deal with the things of this passing world as to hold rather to the things that eternally endure.”

Yours in blessed hope

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lawrence Patrick".

Bishop of Middlesbrough

03.02.2024 – the Feast of St Blaise.

**To be read and made available on the First Sunday of Lent, the weekend of 17/18 February 2024,
in all Churches and Chapels of the Diocese.**