

Pastoral Letter to be read out in Society Parishes on the First Sunday of Lent 2019

Dear Friends in Christ

'Jesus was led by the Spirit through the wilderness, being tempted there by the devil for forty days.'

For forty days, Jesus is taken to the arid, empty desert, the place of simplicity and solitude. Then he returns to the world to fulfil his vocation through death and resurrection. The sand of wilderness is the place of preparation for the blood-stained cross and the empty tomb.

In the season of Lent, we live our lives according to that same pattern. First the Spirit leads us into the wilderness of our hearts: the place of simplicity, of fasting and of prayer, where we can reject afresh a life of selfishness and sin and choose anew for Christ. But then we emerge from that dry and sandy wilderness for the heart of the liturgical year when, at Easter, we have the privilege of renewing the promises of our baptism.

Our whole purpose and identity are given to us through the gifts of baptism and confirmation. Through the water of the font we enter the tomb with Christ, buried with him in order to rise with him. The cross and resurrection of Christ become real for us today and our lives are transformed.

By renewing our baptismal vows on Easter Day, we deepen our share in his risen life. Jesus sends us into the world as witnesses to draw others into relationship with him through our lives, our words and our deeds.

In the past few days the Council of Bishops of The Society has been meeting in London. A constant theme in our conversation has been the gift of baptism and especially how the laity can play a fuller and richer role in the renewal of the catholic movement and of Christian life in our nation. In particular we have been exploring how a shared rule or pattern of life can encourage all God's people to be confident and joyful in living out the Gospel in their daily lives and also associate laypeople more deeply with the work of The Society. We will stay in touch as, over the next months, these plans develop.

Lent calls us to ever deeper conversion to Christ so that we can live out the baptismal vocation to the full. We encourage you therefore to the keeping of a disciplined and holy Lent, to make and adhere to a Lenten rule, to confess sin, to seek Christ anew in this holy season and so to emerge ready to embrace with joy the baptismal life which gives us new life in Christ and the hope of eternal glory.

Thank you for your faithfulness as Christian disciples and for all that you do to support and sustain the life of your parish church. This comes with the assurance of our love and prayers.

Yours in Christ

✘ TONY WAKEFIELD

✘ GLYN BEVERLEY

✘ JONATHAN EBBSFLEET

✘ PHILIP BURNLEY

✘ JONATHAN FULHAM

✘ MARTIN CICESTR:

✘ NORMAN RICHBOROUGH

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