

Message for the Season of Lent 2015

Most Rev Anthony Fisher OP, Archbishop of Sydney

18 February 2015

Each Ash Wednesday the priest says "Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return", or similar words, marking an ashen cross on the person's forehead.

As a schoolboy, I remember feeling solemn and proud to receive that sign of my Catholic identity and to wear it for the rest of the day for all the world to see.

Friday abstinence from meat and fasting on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday were additional tokens of our heroism and Catholic identity which our non-Catholic friends had to cope with if we were at dinner with them on Fridays! And there were extra) prayers like Stations of the Cross to do in Lent for the more earnest.

But are Ash Wednesday and Lent just about external show? No: Lent is first and foremost about turning back to God; saying we're sorry for what we've done wrong and resolving, with God's help, to do better. That's a rather private matter, invisible to the world. Ashes, fasting and the rest are tangible signs of that spiritual renewal.

Which is not to say we should give up on such Lenten practices: quite the opposite! Fasting, such as giving up meat on Fridays (or, dare I suggest, giving up sms-texting and Facebook for Lent!) disciplines the body and purifies the spirit, showing our unruly desires who's boss. In a sense, then, fasting brings us closer to ourselves.

Extra prayer, such as weekday Mass, and especially THE Lenten prayer, Confession, brings us closer to God.

Charitable giving, such as Project Compassion or visiting a lonely person, brings us closer to our neighbours.

So these Lenten practices are not just for external show: they bring us closer to our God, neighbours and selves and that allows a genuine, internal, spiritual renewal.

God bless you with a really fruitful Lent this year, so that come Easter you can rise from the tomb with Christ to new life!