

## *Stepping Forward, Stretching Out and Growing in Love this Lent*

“The earliest mention of Lent in the history of the Church comes from the council of Nicaea 1700 years ago, in 325 AD...The length of time was adopted in imitation of the forty days that Jesus spent in the desert at the beginning of his public ministry. In many languages the word for Lent implies ‘forty’: *Quaresima* deriving from *quaranta* (forty) in Italian; *Cuaresma* coming from *cuarenta* in Spanish; *Carême* deriving from *quarante* in French.

The English word ‘Lent’ has another, very beautiful derivation. It comes from the Anglo-Saxon (early English) word meaning to ‘lengthen’. Lent comes at a time when the hours or daytime are ‘lengthening’, as spring approaches, and so it is a time when **we too can ‘lengthen’ spiritually, when we can stretch out and grow in the Spirit.**

We should not, therefore, place too much emphasis upon our own efforts. Just as the sun was thought to do the work of ‘lengthening’ the days during early Springtime, so it is the sun – in the sense of God’s warmth and light – that does this work in our ‘lengthening’ and growing in Christ. In the English language, indeed, we have a beautiful play on the words ‘sun’ and ‘son’, which are pronounced identically. Just as the sun was seen to do the work of ‘lengthening’ the days in spring, so it is the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who does the work of ‘lengthening’ in our spiritual growth. This image provides a comfort for us in our busy modern world, where hyperactivity can become the norm. Our role during Lent is to cooperate with God’s grace and initiatives, in a sense to relax in the presence of God, rather than to force the pace with our own efforts.

It is important to **remember that Lent is a joyful season.** Some asceticism is important, of course, but it is essential to place the discipline within its proper and positive context: **purification so that we can receive God’s gifts more fully.**

(extracts from ‘[A Short History of Lent](#)’, [Norman Tanner SJ](#), slightly adapted)



### ***Prayer, Fasting and Generous Giving***

During this season, we are invited to take up three “weapons” for our spiritual battle, reflecting the words of Jesus which we will hear on Ash Wednesday:

“*When you give to the needy...And when you pray...And when you fast...*” (Matthew 6)

We commit ourselves to praying more deeply; to fasting; and to giving even more generously to charity or giving more time to support those in need. Prayer, fasting and generous giving are the three tools we as Catholic Christians use to burrow more profoundly beyond the shallow exterior of our existence and to place our roots more deeply into the inexhaustible fountain of life and love which is the Holy Spirit. It can be painful sometimes, but it gives life meaning and purpose and allows us to experience spiritual growth and the healing and transforming power at work within us.

### ***Lenten Small Groups – Catholic Social Teaching***

Small groups are places where we can grow spiritually. They are spaces where we can receive –hospitality, Christian love and care, friendship, wisdom and many other gifts – and where we can offer our own gifts to bring blessings to others. This Lent, I encourage you to participate in our small groups, which will be looking at Catholic Social Teaching. As part of our Jubilee Year of Hope, we are offering 6 sessions (on *Human Dignity; Community and Participation; Option for the Poor; Dignity of Workers; Solidarity and Peace; Care of Creation*). These will include prayer, Scripture study and sharing in the context of Christian fellowship. You can either form your own group with friends or you can join a group we’ll be offering – online or in various locations on different days. Please register your group or choose a group to join by contacting the parish office or filling in this [short form](#).



### ***Lenten Daily Messages***

For the past few years, we've sent out daily email messages to over 300 parishioners, offering a selection of beautiful images, quotations, Scripture passages, pieces of music and reflections. They usually only take 2-3 minutes to read (with optional "going deeper sections" for those who prefer something a little meatier). If you've received these messages before, you should automatically receive them this year too. If you'd like to sign up, you can do so by contacting the parish office or clicking [here](#).



### ***Lenten Fasting Challenge***

I'm slowly discovering that Fasting is one of the most essential and powerful of all the practices of Jesus, although, if we're honest, one of the most neglected in the Western Church for a long time. As you fast, you're praying with your body, offering all that you are to God. As you surrender to Him, you're asking Him to break the control that your physical body and its cravings have over you and are opening up more to the power of the Holy Spirit.

Fasting is hard, especially at first, as we can often become 'hangry', but the benefits are real. When we fast we're learning to be joyful, even when we're not getting what we want; we're 'amplifying' our prayers.

I'm going to be learning more about fasting this Lent and invite you to join me so that we can learn together – for 5 weeks from 6:30-7:30pm on Zoom (or you can register to receive a recording of the session). Please register by contacting the parish office or clicking [here](#).



### ***Children and Families***

We will also be publicising some "Lenten family events" in the newsletter and sending out a weekly email. Please keep an eye out for more details in [Peterpost](#).

### ***Lenten Stations of the Cross***

This is a wonderful devotion, typically Catholic but open to all. During Stations we aim to meditate upon the final stages of Christ's journey to the cross so that we may come closer to Our Lord. You can read more about the [Stations of the Cross here](#). The "classic" Stations of the Cross is by St. Alphonsus de Ligouri but there are countless other versions available, online and in printed form. You can pray the Stations of the Cross by yourself or with others. Why not join with some fellow parishioners to pray the stations this year?

- ✦ [Milner Hall](#) (St. Peter's) - Fridays 11:30am
- ✦ [St. Peter's Church](#) - Sundays 4pm
- ✦ [St. Gregory's Church](#) – Sundays 5:30pm
- ✦ [St. Stephen's Church](#) – Mondays 7pm
- ✦ [St. Thomas More Church](#) – Fridays 5pm

### ***Lenten Reconciliation***

Lent is a wonderful time to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Sometimes, as adults especially, we can worry about this Sacrament – yet it is such a beautiful opportunity, to celebrate God's forgiveness. There are lots of materials which can help you understand the Sacrament and how to prepare for it. You can find one example [here](#).

#### ***St. Peter's***

Confessions, every Saturday during Lent (not 19<sup>th</sup> April), 9:30am-midday; 4:30-5pm

Pastoral Area Lenten Reconciliation Service, Mon 14<sup>th</sup> March, 7pm

OR – by appointment with Fr Mark or Fr Benedict

OR – if you prefer to celebrate this sacrament with a priest you don't know so well, why not think about going to one of our neighbouring parishes? [St. Swithun Wells](#); [St. Joseph's, Basingstoke](#); [St. Mary's, Alton](#); [St. John the Baptist, Andover](#).

**"Sisters and brothers, thanks to God's love in Jesus Christ, we are sustained in the hope that does not disappoint (cf. *Rom* 5:5). Hope is the "sure and steadfast anchor of the soul".**

[Pope Francis, Message for Lent](#)