

ENCOURAGEMENT



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‘Reader’...

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The time of Lent is a time of refreshment and reflection. On Wednesday 5th March we start just such a time. It is useful to perhaps reflect on the things that we take for granted, like our family and friends and how much we contribute to their welfare and how much we really care for them. We could ask if we do things ‘rote’ and not out of love, or perhaps in order to get something back from them, which is ‘self’, rather than ‘other’ centred. We could perhaps think of the people we know who are sick or have difficulties and what we do to make their lives better. We could think of the world that we live in and choose a location to pray for, especially at this time of a very troubled and unsettled and unsettling world. We may reflect on our life in the church and our own prayer life... is there anything that is lacking? Should we perhaps speak to someone about it... What about our participation in the work of the church... do we feel left out? Do we leave all the jobs to others.?

If you have ever tried to recruit new people for jobs, you may know the kind of things that get in the way of a positive response. Some will say that they have no time as they are too busy. Some may say that they simply couldn’t, that they are too shy or lack confidence or are too worried about getting something wrong... others may say that they just don’t want to get that involved... it is okay for others but not them, they leave it to the ‘holy Joes’. Some perhaps have never been asked, or sidelined, which is very sad, and maybe they could volunteer?

There are many types of work that need to be done in the church, all of which have a call attached to them. Clearly some choices are vocational, such as Marriage, Priesthood or Diaconate or Religious life, but there are many, many works that can be a commitment for a period of time, longer or shorter as the case maybe. These are endless, from helping to keep the church tidy or clean, making beautiful

displays of flowers and for special feasts.

There are parish councils to join and other subgroups of the work of a parish or diocese There are welcomers, so important in these days of anonymity and loneliness. There is the work of the Sacristan, and altar server, so often forgotten about, not to forget being a Catechist. There are also jobs that require training or a deep commitment to the prayer life of the church. Not all the works can be done by the same people and being respectful of the gifts and talent of any group is vital to its happiness and blessing. The important thing is that they are done to the best of our ability.

Two acts that come to mind that require ongoing commitment which may present a challenge but are vital to the life of the church are ‘Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion’, to give them the correct title (often referred to incorrectly as ministers of Holy Communion as only the Priest is the Minister, the word extra referring to being a helper). This also involves essentially taking Holy Communion to the sick of the community. The second is the Office of Reader. Since the Second Vatican Council both have been acknowledged as being able to be performed by Lay people.

Sadly, these are often given a hierarchy of importance and with that, a fear of offering to help. Both of the last-mentioned fall into that category. Undoubtedly, they require commitment and an understanding of the rôle, but it takes all sort of people to undertake them and bring life to the church.

The Rôle of Reader is a vital one... it is a great privilege to be asked, or called, to be a Reader and much taken for granted. Reading from the Old Testament and the Psalms are essential to the understanding of what we are called to be and what we understand is our calling as Christians. The

‘If you do not live out your faith enthusiastically, maybe you don’t have any faith’ Ven. Archbishop Fulton Sheen

Readings before the Gospel are a preparation for it and it is vital that they are both listened to and understood. These are not ‘mere words’ to be read in a hurry or matter of fact but spoken in a way that enlightens and encourages the listener to take note and to reflect upon. The Readings in Lent are especially important for that reason as they culminate in the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus, the pinnacle of our faith. It is understandable therefore that some may find this difficult and shy away from it... but there are many ways of learning how to be a sound reader and every reader learns as time goes on, to improve...

In some places there are courses to help in the practice of reading and how to project one’s voice and read more slowly or quickly as the case may be. There are aids, such as pronouncing difficult or foreign words available in booklet form or from someone who knows. It is part of the duty of a reader to prepare to read by looking at the readings of the day and if called on the day itself, to allow time to look at the reading before the Mass or service. Some may like to ask for help if uncertain as to the correct reading. Indeed, knowing the sequence and what is required on a particular day or Sunday is important. This takes time and patience, and a prospective reader *should not be put off by that* as these are usually available and set out before a service takes place, but it is helpful to understand where to find the readings.

A good reader will also find time to read from the Bible so as to become familiar with it and take it to heart. Another way to gain courage and to prepare is to join a prayer group that concentrates its prayer on the reflections on The Word such as ‘Lectio Divina’ or maybe Bible study... all of which help to make things clearer. It is important to teach children and encourage them to read and parents do this well, but what about encouraging them to read from the Bible at an early stage, even from a children’s version.

Courage is built up that way to speak in Public without fear. Schools are often places where this can be done...

The Office of Reader, and that is what it is, is part of the stages of priesthood. This is often forgotten, and a priest will go through this stage at some point, then going on to, the other offices and priesthood. The Ministry of Reader requires careful preparation as it

is through them that the Word is passed on the congregation.

The impact of God’s message will depend on the reader’s conviction, preparation, and delivery. Reverence toward the Scriptures is important; the Church sees an intimate link between “the table of God’s Word” and “the table of the Eucharist.” From the first, the divine covenant is announced, and the Church grows in wisdom; from the other, the covenant is renewed, and the Church grows in holiness.

It is wise too, to remember that it is not the readers words that are being conveyed. A useful habit is to remind oneself of this when reading with the following prayer as you prepare to read. *‘Not my words Lord, but yours, and not my inflection but yours, and not my emphasis but yours.* This way the readers becomes a channel, but also a listener at the same time.

So perhaps this Lent you might consider offering to be a reader or any other ministry or service in the church. Think and pray about it...and maybe volunteer. You will be abundantly blessed.

Halina Holman©

Pope Francis

Like the apostles, Christians today also are called to become "God's messengers and witnesses to a world drowning in words, yet thirsting for the very word it so often ignores." Rome 2013

‘Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.’
Heb.4:12

Feast Days in March

1st St. David, Patron of Wales

2nd Eighth Sunday in Ord. time

4th St. Casimir

5th Ash Wednesday (Fasting & Abstinence)

6th St. Colette

7th Sts. Perpetua & Felicity 8th St. John of God

9th First Sunday of Lent

10th St. John Ogilvie

15th St. Louise Murillac

16th Second Sunday of Lent

17th St. Patrick, Patron of Ireland

18th St. Cyril of Jerusalem

19th St. Joseph

23rd Third Sunday of Lent

25th The Annunciation of the Lord

30th Fourth Sunday of Lent, Mothers’ Day

