

Reflection from Sean for the first Sunday of Lent

Just a few days ago on Ash Wednesday, we entered into the holy season of Lent. A time of preparation for the great feast of Easter when we celebrate Our Lord's victory over sin and death. It's a season which begins with ashes, symbolic of death and ends with water, symbolic of new life. These symbols are outward signs of a transformation that must take place within ourselves.

On Ash Wednesday we might have heard the priest using words from today's Gospel text, *Repent, and believe in the Gospel*, before sprinkling our heads with ash. They express, as it were, the consequence of the other phrase which can be used at that point: *remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.*¹ It is with this instruction to repent that Jesus began his preaching ministry in the account we read in St Mark's Gospel after his forty days in the wilderness.

Christ's forty days in the wilderness are clearly the pattern of the forty days of our Lenten fast. We should seek to imitate his example, remembering that Christ was tempted too. Where our Lord's journey in the wilderness would lead him, perhaps he didn't know, but where our Lenten journey will end up is clear. We must follow where our Lord has gone, in denial of self, self-sacrifice and repentance. It is of course a journey that isn't just made once a year, but one which punctuates our life of faith.

This journey began at our baptism, when we were freed from sin and reconciled to God through the resurrection of Jesus, as St Peter tells us in today's second reading. As a consequence of our Baptism, our life is conformed to Christ, and we have been commissioned by him to undertake that mission of proclaiming the good news which he began in Galilee.²

Even though we are called to share the good news with others, we still need to hear it ourselves too. The call to repentance Jesus makes is not about a single moment of conversion, but rather a call to a lifelong process of transformation, taking to heart more fully and appreciating more deeply the message of the Gospel which has been preached to us.

Making time for God and the things of God in this season of Lent is part of how we recognise and express the truth that his kingdom is at hand. Our response is a profession of faith that we have heard and received the message of the Gospel, and are trying – albeit in a very moderate form, compared to going into the actual desert – to model our lives on that of Jesus himself.

¹ cf Gen 3:19

² cf Mt 28:19-20