



1st Week of Lent 9 March 2025

Reflection by Mgr Daniel McHugh

“New Life”

“One does not live on bread alone”

(Matthew 4:4)

The origins of the word ‘Lent’ are connected to Spring, the lengthening of the days, and new life. We’re hearing a good deal in the media about bird song and Spring flowers. It is a joy to go for a walk and see the change of season around us: Winter coming to an end as trees and plants begin to bud and birds begin to build their nests. The Season of Lent in the Church reminds us that for new life to emerge there has to be a certain dying to self first, a time of penance that gives way to spiritual growth. It was a joy to join in midday Mass and Blessing of Ashes at St Augustine’s Church, Solihull yesterday for the traditional ceremony to mark the beginning of Lent. Deacon Kevin O’Connor had already been to the Primary School for the Blessing and Imposition of Ashes, and Father Stephen Fleming from Our Lady of the Wayside, Shirley, had been to St Peter’s Secondary School. There was a wonderful sense of the Catholic Community gathering to begin these 40 Days to Fast, Pray and give Alms in different ways and so to be ready to identify with the ultimate dying of self that Jesus showed us on the Cross on Good Friday. As Father Dominic the Parish Priest placed the Cross in Ash on each person’s forehead, I could hear him say: *“Repent, and believe in the Gospel”*. Later, in the afternoon I went to a Care Home in the Parish to visit a girl from my class in school (in Coventry) where I blessed ashes and gave her Holy Communion. As I placed the Ashes on her forehead I used the alternative words for the Imposition *“Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return”*.

For all of us it is the beginning of a Season where we profess our Faith, our Trust, our Hope in the one who died and rose to new life, and who showed us the way to that new life too. It is a time when we are experiencing a great deal of uncertainty as a country and political instability: the old order seems to be changing and we are wondering about our security as a result. The Catholic thing is not to ignore all of this, but we can be reassured as ‘Pilgrims of Hope’ in this Jubilee Year that we have in Jesus Risen from the Dead, the one who ‘has our back’, who remains with us on our journey. And, as on the First Sunday of Lent we are reminded in the Gospel *“man shall not live by bread alone”*, we are given a unique opportunity to pray and address the deepest issues in our lives. I was listening yesterday, Ash Wednesday, to Rev. Lucy Winkett of St James, Picadilly on ‘Thought for the Day’ on Radio 4: she was speaking about AI (very much in the news these days) and how it can be a power for good (I have to admit using ChatGPT to help me compose a Reference!) and also a power for evil and through what she called ‘emergent misalignment’ i.e. it can lead us in the wrong direction. I haven’t experienced

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that, I think, but I know we have to address our own potential to distort truth, to abuse power in ourselves: we can see it happening in politics and in society, but do we always see “*the log in our own eye*”? The Temptations Jesus faced in the Gospel of the First Sunday of Lent are our Temptations too. Our answer must be: “*You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.*” The Loyola Press Commentary on the Gospel for this First Sunday Year C says this:

“The depth of Jesus’ trust in God is shown most fully when Jesus rejects the temptation to turn away from the task God has given to him. Jesus’ final rebuke to the devil is his sacrifice on the Cross. Jesus’ response to the Temptations of the devil teaches us how we can respond to temptation. As we start our journey through Lent, this Sunday’s Gospel calls us to adopt the same confidence that Jesus had in the face of temptation: God’s word alone will suffice, God’s promise of protection can be trusted, and God alone is God.”

St Paul in the section from the letter to the Romans for the 1st Sunday of Lent quotes Scripture, “*Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved*” (Joel 3:5). All hands on his own experience.

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