



*"Fear not, for I am with you."  
Isaiah 41:10*

## LENTEN MESSAGE 2022

Dear friends in Christ,

Lent is the special time for spiritual preparation before the celebration of Christianity's greatest Solemnity at Easter. Lent is a sober time of penance, repentance and conversion, prayer and generously giving to the needy.

For many people, the Covid crisis of the last two years has been like a Lenten period. It has been a sober time of restrictions and loss. For many, the uncertainty of the last two years has caused them to reflect on their lives, to re-prioritise what is truly important to them. For others, it provided the catalyst to turn more intently to God in prayer and be generous and kind in thinking of others. Like in Lent everyone was looking forward to a great day when we would all be free again and could rejoice.

Unlike Lent, though, the Covid Pandemic also brought out the worst in many people. Some people handled the uncertainties of the last two years with increased selfishness and aggression towards anyone who disagreed with them. Some people were more interested in following the 'mob' whipped up by mainstream media and social media in vilifying others and treating them with contempt.

So, back to Lent 2022. With what has happened over the last two years we all might need to have a good look at ourselves in the light of Christ and identify thoughts and actions that we need to repent of in order to come closer in Love to Jesus Christ.

One of the difficulties we have in our Australian society with repentance and conversion is a culture of no responsibility. It seems that it is very rare to find anyone who will take full responsibility for their actions these days - it is always someone else's fault. But to repent requires us to admit our failings and to take responsibility for them. The reality is that we have been created by God and given free will in order to choose to love Him and which also means we can choose not to love Him. We, therefore, are responsible for the choices we make and the consequences of our choices.

The American Jewish novelist, Meyer Levin put it like this - *For free will to exist, evil had to exist, in order that man's choice might be his own. God could not thereafter permit Himself to interfere in man's actions, for then there would be an end to free will and an end to the ascending revelation of life....For man to become truly free, God had to put man's will beyond even divine intervention.*

When we are humble before the Lord admitting our sins and taking responsibility for them, which is true humility, that the ocean of God's Mercy can wipe them away in the great Sacrament of forgiveness - Penance and Reconciliation. Then the obstacles to the working of God's Grace are removed and we can have a closer more intimate union with Jesus Christ - The Way, The Truth, and The Life.

*It is in accordance with their dignity as persons - that is, beings endowed with reason and free will and therefore privileged to bear personal responsibility - that all men should be at once impelled by nature and also bound by a moral obligation to seek the truth, especially religious truth. (Second Vatican Council - 'Religious Freedom')*

So, dear friends, This Lent let us thank God for the gift of our Free Will, let us implore the Holy Spirit to enlighten our minds and hearts that we may make the right choices that will bring us closer to God and the Have the humility to be responsible for our sins so that we may receive the Lord's boundless Mercy and Forgiveness.

I will conclude with a Lenten thought from St Benedict -

*In these days, therefore, let us add something beyond the prescribed measure of our service, such as private prayers and abstinence in food and drink. Let each one, over and above the measure prescribed for him, offer God something of his own free will in the joy of the Holy Spirit. (St Benedict).*

Yours in Christ

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Columba Macbeth-Green'.

The Most Reverend Columba Macbeth-Green OSPPE DD  
*Bishop of Wilcannia-Forbes*