

PASTORAL LETTER ON THE FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

(Please read at all Masses on 24th/25th February 2007)

My Dear People,

The Lenten journey is all about conversion, a turning around, a change of heart. Allow me to suggest three areas for reflection this Lent.

1. A Change in our Way of Living

CAFOD, supported by The Bishops' Conferences has recently launched a new and important project called 'Live Simply'. It calls on us to commit ourselves, in certain areas, to live more simply in order to assist and show solidarity with the poorer people of our world. It makes suggestions such as organising 'simple lunches' and giving the money to CAFOD. We could also cut back in our own life-style in order to help others. The Chief Rabbi, Dr Jonathan Sachs speaks of: 'the poverty of affluence' – an age that has so much alongside poverty in neighbouring streets as well as in developing countries. Many of you are very generous to CAFOD in the two collections taken each year, but perhaps we could commit ourselves to giving a regular sum each month.

2. A Change in How We See our Planet

Earlier this year the Pope spoke strongly about the threat of climate change and said that the Vatican would be holding an important International conference on this subject towards the end of this year. It was confirmed recently by the International Panel on Climate Change that sea levels are rising, the temperature is climbing and tropical storms are becoming more and more intense. We are warned that our planet is in serious trouble. Recognising this is but one step. As Catherine Pepinster, the Editor of *The Tablet*, said on *Thought for the Day*, there is a far greater step to take ~ to understand the need to change. It is a fact that people do not always respond well to requests to change in their behaviour, nor to being persuaded into adjusting their way of life. However, the crisis our planet faces requires real conversion ~ a true change of heart which will help us to see the world in a different way. If, as the book of Genesis tells us, we were given dominion over the earth, that dominion bestowed upon us responsibility. We are coming to appreciate that Climate Change is not just a problem for scientists or even an economic issue. It is a moral one.

3. A Change in our Relationship with God

Today's Gospel of the three temptations of Christ invites us to put God firmly at the centre of our lives rather than other substitutes that seek to fill that space.

The first temptation, when Jesus is tempted to turn stones into bread, corresponds to the attraction of ease and self-indulgence. The second, to throw himself off the temple is perhaps the temptation to the sin of pride, ambition and self-seeking. The third, to worship the tempter, may be understood as the worship of any idol which deflects us from fidelity to God. Conversion is a daily task since at each moment we have to make choices to follow God's way or our own. It implies a radical change inside ourselves which then alters the way we relate to God and others. It will affect our values, attitudes, choices, priorities.

I have proposed three areas for reflection this Lent. Each is linked since if we choose to 'Live Simply' then we can help both our planet and our neighbour. May God give us His grace as we journey through Lent to the great feast of Easter.

+Thomas McMahon
Bishop of Brentwood