

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

'Dare to Dream' is a Lent resource for our Diocese this year and I commend it to you. The resource follows on from our reflections over the past three years when we have looked at what it means to be a Church in communion, at prayer and with a mission. This Lent we are called to dream, and we do so in the context of the coronavirus pandemic. As we look to the future we ask what sort of Church do we want to be? What do we want for ourselves as members of the Church? As Pope Francis says 'this is a moment to dream big, to re-think our priorities – what we value, what we want, what we seek – and to commit to act in our daily life what we have dreamed', or to put it another way, as someone said to me recently: if we do not dream how can we shape the future?

We can predict the future to a certain extent but the future can also be full of surprises – some pleasant, some not so. We plan for the future in this present time, but we have a past that gives us an identity. We have our own personal history, but we also have our history as part of the Church and humanity. Into our world comes Jesus, the way, the truth, the life. He comes to reconnect us to God, to one another and to the whole of creation. He comes to renew our lives and deepen our understanding of his dream which he calls the Kingdom of God. He never defines the Kingdom but he often describes it and always lives it to the point of death by crucifixion. However, that is not the end. There is resurrection, a new beginning, a new life. Jesus comes that we might have life and have it to the full.

Jesus asks us to live the values of the Kingdom of God. He calls a people to himself and sends them into the world to make the world a better place and to give hope to those who are despondent, indifferent, or fatalistic. We are that people called and sent by God for the people and world of our day.

Lent is a time of renewal and reconciliation for us as individuals but also as members of a community entrusted with the message of the Gospel, which is to be shared with others. Sometimes we forget that vocation, that responsibility. Lent invites us to allow God to rekindle in us what it means to be the Church. St Paul proclaims on Ash Wednesday: Now is a favourable time; this is the day of salvation.

Self-denial is part of our Lenten journey to Easter. We deny ourselves something which we usually enjoy. The purpose of this is not to punish ourselves but to make us more aware of those in need who are our brothers and sisters. We are called to help them but also to challenge those structures which cause inequality and widen the gap between those who are rich and those who are poor. We are called to act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly with our God.

This Lent we should acknowledge those who are working almost to the point of exhaustion in our hospitals, care homes, schools, essential services, and families who are having to provide schooling for their children. They have had to deny themselves for the good of others. To them we say thank you and promise our prayers.

Prayer opens us to the presence of God. Prayer broadens our horizons because it moves us from being self-centred to being God centred and opens us to the needs of others. Prayer is listening to God through the Scriptures, the Sacraments and through one another. Having listened we are better able to make a response in word and action. Listening is often a challenge because we may find our comfort zones questioned. One resolution for this Lent might be to ask for the gift of being able to listen before we speak.

In today's Gospel Jesus touches the leper and cures him. The leper says to Jesus 'if you want to, you can cure me'. Jesus replies 'of course I want to', and he cures him. As we prepare to enter the season of Lent we are allowing Jesus to touch our lives and to say to us 'be cured'. In that touch and that cure we dare to dream of what the Kingdom of God might mean to us as God's people journeying towards Easter and our eternal life.

With my best wishes and prayers

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