

Richard



Bishop of Arundel & Brighton

**PASTORAL LETTER
for the 14th February 2021
6th Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

The great season of Lent is approaching. Lent is a time of repentance, of renewal and of healing. Perhaps, like me, you look forward to this time. These coming forty days are a great gift to us, for Lent invites us to engage more deeply with the Gospel message as we prepare to celebrate the events of our Salvation - the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus.

The account of the healing of the leper that we hear in today's Gospel is a very good preparation for Lent. The leper had to overcome the stigma that went along with the disease. He had to find the courage that enabled him to step back into the company of others, conscious that the society of his day would not welcome him. Not only did Jesus welcome him, He touched him. This physical contact, of which he had been deprived - perhaps for many years - brought healing of his sickness and the social and psychological burdens that went along with the disease. This was healing beyond measure.

This account in the Gospel calls us to stand before the Lord just as we are, with our ills and failings. Like the sick man in the Gospel, we must place our trust totally in the person of Jesus Christ. The joy that this trust engenders in us is beyond our description and, even in these difficult times, is a wonderful consolation.

This coming Lent, therefore, let us stand before the Lord as we truly are. This will demand a little courage, but the Lord wishes to reach out to us, to touch us with his healing and forgiveness that we may be truly at one with Him.

This Lent, we can all be assisted on this journey through a new initiative for our Diocese - 'Invited'. This is more than an event. It is a journey, a pilgrimage through the weeks of Lent. It is something in which every one of us can take part and it will call us to a renewed experience of Jesus' call to us.

This last year has been a difficult one for us all, as we live through the Covid-19 pandemic. Our lives have been touched in different ways: sickness and the deep sadness of bereavement, isolation and uncertainty, financial challenges, additional demands on our school communities, closure of churches and different demands for priests and deacons, the immense responsibilities that have come to healthcare professionals and others 'in the front line' of care for the sick. 'Invited' is, therefore, timely - for it is for every person. It can nourish us as individuals, as parish and deanery communities and as a Diocese.

'Invited' is a mission experience prepared and given by our Diocesan Formation team. Thanks go to them for all the preparation that is going on for the benefit of us all.

Information has already been circulated to parishes. Further information will be available through newsletters, Diocesan e-news and the website. Each Monday of Lent, there will be a gathering that can be accessed 'virtually'. This will continue to be accessible afterwards. At the end of this gathering, some questions will be offered for reflection, in preparation for a second meeting each Thursday that will help us to prepare for the coming Sunday.

In the coming years, we shall have opportunities for similar mission experiences, with a focus on a different liturgical season each year. These will lead us to the 60th Anniversary of the foundation of the Diocese in 2025.

Let us all be open to be 'Invited' afresh by the Lord this Lent. He invites us to be His each and every day of our lives. With the sick man in today's Gospel, let us rely on the gift of His mercy that we may accept His love for us and grow ever closer to Him who suffered and died for us. In this way, our celebration of Easter will be an experience of His new life, enabling us to proclaim his Resurrection to the world.

With every Blessing,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+Richard". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.