

***Lent as Conversion of Life -
Repent and believe in the Gospel!***

SPRINGLINE PARISH / FIRST SUNDAY AFTER LENT/18 FEBRUARY 2018

Readings: Genesis 9.8-17; 1 Peter 3. 18-22; Mark 1. 9-15

Introduction

A priest walked into a pub, indignant to find so many of his parishioners there. He rounded them up and shepherded them into the church.

Then he solemnly said, 'All those who want to go to heaven, step over here to the left.' Everyone stepped over except one man, who stubbornly stood his ground.

The priest looked at him fiercely and said, 'Don't you want to go to heaven?'

'No,' said the man.

'Do you mean to stand there and tell me you don't want to go to heaven when you die?'

'Of course, I want to go to heaven when I die. I thought you were going now!'

We are ready to go all the way – only when our brakes don't work.
(D'Mello, *The heart of the Enlightened*, 16)

The kingdom of God has come

Mk 1. 15 : *'The time has come,' he said, 'The kingdom of God has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!'*

Our friend in the story thought of heaven and the kingdom of God as something at the end of one's life, as something in the future, quite like the belief of Judaism of Jesus' time that the 'kofG' referred primarily to God's future display of power and judgement, that it referred to the future establishment of God's rule in all creation.

Instead, Jesus can't be clearer than what he has declared : He speaks of fulfilment – occurring now!

Instead, Jesus tells that this kingdom is 'at hand', here, now!

'The time has come,' he said, 'The kingdom of God has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!'

God's 'kingdom' will demand a re-orientation of life, as John had already made clear. That is why Jesus clearly declares:

Repent and believe the good news!

These are the first recorded words of Jesus! Repenting and believing. The main focus of 'Lent' is 'conversion of life'.

It is not just about some practices, although they are, of course, useful.
If the religious practices help in our conversion of life, like fasting, helping the poor, fine.

'Repent' and 'believe' in the 'good news' is something more fundamental that touches our Christian existence and our Christian life.

This is an intense struggle that lasts not just 40 days, but lasts a lifetime.

The essential task for us is confronting evil through repenting and believing in God in a new way - that is a total turning of oneself away from evil and toward God, believing is embracing God and living in God's Kingdom.

Focus on God

Totally and absolutely turning and restoring our focus on God.

It's opening our hearts so that his grace and blessings can flow freely in to our hearts and souls.

It is removing the hurdles, the blocks, the obstructions so that God is sovereign in our hearts, in our thoughts, in our families.

It is remembering again 'who' we are by our baptism which is a covenant of relationship with God that makes us 'sons and daughters' of God!

Conclusion: Lent, a time to grow closer to God!

Verse 13 : And he was in the wilderness 40 days, tempted by Satan –

We speak about the forty days of Jesus in the desert. Rather than recalling Israel's wandering in the desert for 40 years, the number was an echo of the 40 day testing undergone by Moses (Ex 34.28) and Elijah (1Kgs 19.8)

40 days of Lent before the Resurrection of Jesus, 40 days after Easter before the Pentacost.

Satan: symbol of opposition to God's people. The reality of evil is a fact in the world and in our lives.

Lent is not popular, like medicine. But we have no choice if we want to get well, same with Lent. It is a time of renewal, restoration, 'conversion'.

Lent has to do with conversion of life through repentance and believing.

(ST Mattapally]