

Vox Episcopi – The Voice of the Bishop

2 February 2022

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

Many people have now returned to work and students are beginning a new school year. There has been much to organise to ensure a safe and smooth return to the classrooms and my thanks to all our dedicated teachers and committed staff with Catholic Schools Broken Bay who have worked assiduously for the wellbeing not only of our students and their families but all their fellow colleagues in our schools in the diocese. A great deal of work has gone on behind the scenes and I want you to know your professionalism and pastoral support is greatly appreciated.

At such a busy time it is possible to overlook the significance of the beautiful Feast of the Presentation of the Lord we celebrate today, 2 February, the fortieth day after the festival of Christmas where we welcomed the birth of the Lord.

Saint Luke tells us how Joseph and Mary took the infant Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem in accordance with the Jewish custom of the day (Luke 2:22-40). The presentation of Jesus was also important because of the presence of Simeon and Anna.

The Evangelist Luke tells us that the Holy Spirit visited Simeon and revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Christ of God, and to go to the Temple that day. Simeon did so and taking Jesus in his arms recognised Him as the Lord. Anna, also elderly and a prophetess who lived in the Temple, recognised Jesus as the Messiah.

What we learn from St Luke's Gospel is the importance of being patient when it comes to God's promises. Our patience should mirror God's patience and with the many challenges that will still no doubt present to all of us this year, together, let us pray to be more patient with ourselves and each other.

I have also prepared some thoughts for you on the approaching Season of Lent which is a marvellous time of preparation for the celebration of Easter.

Ash Wednesday may seem like a little "down the track" but time spent in faithful preparation is faithfully rewarded. Lenten penance can be another good test of our patience! My full Lenten Penance for the Diocese can be found below.

While you read this edition of BBNeighbourhoods, I will be on my way to Rome. As well as being present at a Symposium on the Priesthood I will be attending several meetings in the Eternal City. There are still many restrictions and health challenges in Italy, so I humbly ask you to keep me in your prayers that I might return to you safe and well at the end of the month.

While I am away the Vicar General, Fr David Ranson, will administer the Diocese of my behalf.

With my prayers and blessing to you and your families.

+Anthony



LENTEN PENANCE

The Season of Lent is a time of preparation for the celebration of Easter. It is an annual journey whereby we are drawn more deeply into the mystery of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council taught that the Lenten liturgy has a twofold means of preparation. By remembering their own Baptism and undertaking penance, the liturgy assists in the renewal and ongoing formation of the *faithful* (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 109). The formation of *catechumens* via the various stages of the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults is equally an important part of Lent (cf. GIRM 27).

For both the local community of the faithful and the elect, Lent is a time of grace and mercy whereby the Holy Spirit greets and renews those who seek to live as disciples of the Lord Jesus, who is our light and our salvation (cf. Psalm 27).

The Season of Lent commences on **Ash Wednesday**. Given the challenges of the past two years and the turbulent disruption for so many in our community of the Church, Lent 2022 will be a particularly important time to reconnect with the Body of Christ; to reflect upon our spiritual pilgrimage both as individuals and as one community of disciples.

In our Catholic tradition, it is commemorated as a time for conversion, repentance, and renewal. Marking our foreheads with ashes on Ash Wednesday is an outward sign of internal conversion. It is also an invitation to “*Turn away from sin and believe the good news*”. In this annual invitation, we acknowledge our human vulnerability, and we pray to be strengthened by God’s grace, mercy, and love.

In imitation of Jesus our teacher and master, we also fast (cf. Matthew 4:1-11). Like Our Lord, we will journey into the desert places of our life. Where the Lord has gone, we hope to follow, and so we must expect some challenges and temptations because the Gospel reminds us that this too was the plight of Jesus. Christians are people of hope, so during these moments of vulnerability, let us take shelter in God’s mercy and compassion.

DAYS OF PENANCE

On Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, abstinence from meat is to be observed by those who have completed their fourteenth year of age. Those who are aged between 18 and 60 are to fast on these days. Priests should encourage those under their pastoral care to embrace the spirit of abstinence and fasting. This Lenten practice is not to be a burden upon those who have health issues or special needs. During this time of pandemic, pastors of souls will be particularly vigilant as to encourage the faithful to undertake the disciplines of Lent with moderation and care.



On all other Fridays of the year the law of the common practice of penance is fulfilled by performing any one of the following:

1. *Prayer* – for example, Mass attendance; family prayer; a visit to a church or chapel; reading the Bible; making the Stations of the Cross; praying the Rosary; or in other ways;
2. *Self-denial* – for example, not eating meat; not eating sweets or deserts; giving up entertainment to spend time with the family; limiting food and drink so as to give to the poor in one's own country and elsewhere; limiting screen time on social media; or in other ways;
3. *Helping others* – for example, special attention to someone who is poor, sick, elderly, lonely or overburdened or feeling isolated from our Church community; or in other ways.

Lent is from **Ash Wednesday** (2 March 2022) until the **Mass of the Lord's Supper** (14 April 2022) inclusive. Fasting is also observed on **Good Friday** and if possible, on **Holy Saturday** until the Easter Vigil.

PASCHAL PRECEPT

Each of the faithful is obliged to receive Holy Communion at least once a year. This is done between **Ash Wednesday** and **Trinity Sunday** (12 June 2022), unless for a good reason it is done at another time during the year.

All the faithful who have reached the age of discretion (seven years old) are obliged to confess their grave sins at least once a year. Given the disruption to community gatherings that can occur during the pandemic, Priests in the Diocese of Broken Bay are encouraged to make a special effort this year by making available to the faithful the first form of the Rite of Penance.

I encourage you to read the Scriptures in your homes, individually and as a family. Likewise, you may take the opportunity to be part of a Lenten prayer or discussion group, face to face or online. The Paschal mystery is the heart of the Eucharist. Personal private prayer before the Blessed Sacrament is a wonderful way to probe the mystery of faith. Our churches are regularly open outside of Mass times to assist the faithful in making a visit for prayer and adoration. Stations of the Cross are also a splendid spiritual devotion in our tradition, providing us with the occasion to walk the way to Calvary with Christ. While individuals can follow the *Via Crucis* on any day of Lent, the Stations are particularly meaningful on the Fridays of Lent and Good Friday.

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ, I pray in these weeks ahead that our community of the Church of Broken Bay will be open to encounter new life in Christ. This Lent, may we humbly confess our sins, prayerfully perform our penance, and joyfully proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ through words and deeds of charity, mercy, and compassion.

Most Rev Anthony Randazzo DD JCL
Bishop of Broken Bay

6 February 2022