

Holy Week invites us to walk the narrow path with Jesus

ONE of the things that civilisation and modern technology has done is widened our paths.

This has had a massive influence in the lives of people, their preferences as well as choices. There are few narrow options left, and often even they have alternatives.

Narrow rough roads are made wider and smooth, staircases are replaced with lifts, and close family circles are widely replaced by distant virtual bonds. Individualism grows and glows daily, people feel less obliged to be kind, and are less moved to be compassionate.

The Lenten journey demands of us an attentive ear, an empty heart, a docile will, a patient body, and a fervent, compassionate and faithful soul. This is the ideal at the heart of the teaching of Christianity. But it is more especially demanded of us in this Lenten pilgrimage as we deeply meditate on the greatest accomplishment of our 'becoming'.

We speak of 'becoming' because that is what the Lord's passion and death marks.

In this Lenten reflection, Carfin-based Brother Shimbo Pastory urges readers to make the most of the intense days of the end of Lent to grow in the spiritual life

It is the peak of our being made children of God. It is the long awaited turning point. We can borrow the terms 'being' and 'becoming' from the ancient philosophical debate, as they rightly serve the purpose of teaching us faith and life lessons in this time of Lent.

The Cross of Jesus which calls us to this commemoration every year is itself a testimony of great becoming, especially with the triumph at the resurrection of Jesus. George Maloney, S.J. makes a remark in his book 'Prayer of the Heart':

"The Cross was an instrument of degrading torture reserved for slaves and criminals. After the death of Jesus we could have expected that his first followers would want to forget about this part of the story ... But the opposite happens.

"The Lord who rose is the good news. And the cross on

which he hung is celebrated in creed, liturgy, song, art and literature. Crosses are fashioned in wood, stones, and precious metals.

"They are raised high on buildings, they adorn altars and graves. They are carried in pockets, worn about the necks. Why? Because the human heart reads the Calvary scene correctly and understands that the theme of this drama is love and that we are objects of that love."

At all times, God has a way of making his goodness known to us through the thorny, hard, and narrow paths that many fear to tread. Our 'being' is transformed with a continual steadfastness and faith in this 40 days pilgrimage.

At the end of the 40 days we will be assured of change through our dutifulness on the journey. This change is the promise of the crown of resurrection with the Lord



Jesus, as with the help of his grace we die to sin and rise to live uprightly.

Lent can be a very beautiful gift to oneself when one willingly chooses to denounce excesses, and occasions of unrewarding pleasure and gain; when one chooses to think about the future life and make amends for good.

With this disposition we come to realise that we need God so much as on our own we can neither find fulfillment nor accomplish anything. This will help us to pray more. St John Henry Newman teaches us that: "As our bodily life discovers itself by its activity, so is the presence of the Holy Spirit in us discovered by a spiritual activity; and this activity is the spirit of continual

prayer."

Inner tranquility is very important in our journey of faith. The world is full of distractions and preoccupations. There is always too much to listen to, to admire, to read, to watch, to taste, to feel, to follow, to like, to comment about, to share, to consume, and to experience. All these contribute to our anxieties, fears, insecurities, loneliness and even spiritual dryness if we allow them.

With inner peace one gets to know that God does not give us a river, but rather a brook which sometimes flows and sometimes dries up; all to teach us, as one author writes, "not to rest on the river, but on God himself." St Augustine rightly said: "Our hearts are restless until they rest in you (God)."

Having sufficient material goods for the things we need often comes with a tempting feeling of invincibility and over-confidence in the supply of the things we have. Our spiritual activities make more impact when we are attentive to the signs of the times and are moved to show solidarity with the suffering world.

With a heart fixed on the Lord we are able to transcend the myopic vision. It takes a leap of faith to choose the narrow path, but that is what the Lord wants of us, to have him always before us and in everything we do.

While the modern world speedily embraces a selfish way of living, we are called to be witnesses in genuine solidarity with the poor, the abandoned and marginalized, victims of war and indifference, the lonely, the sorrowful, the sick, the aged, the terminally ill, and all other people around us.

Lent calls on us to narrow down our priorities, to find time in our busy schedule to pray and pay forward the kindness we ourselves enjoy from God.

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Following in Ozanam's footsteps

SERVING food and clothing to the poor, homeless and needy in Glasgow is what the Vincentians at the Frederic Ozanam Centre have been doing since the 1970s.

The premises have moved a few times over the years – Candleriggs and Parnie Street – but the Centre is currently at 9–13 Bridgegate off the Saltmarket in Glasgow.

In recent years, the members of the Our Lady of the Wayside SSVP Conference – who run the Ozanam Centre – have begun to see an increase in refugees coming through their doors from many places around the world, whilst continuing to support the regulars who have been coming along for years.

The Centre, like so many other charities was forced to close its doors in March 2020 then reopened with a limited service in May 2021.

Since then, the volunteers have continued to build the clothing service back up to the way it was pre-pandemic, providing clothing to dozens of men every Thursday evening.

Through collaboration with Strathclyde University



BY SEAN MURPHY

Catholic Society, University of Glasgow SSVP and St Maurice's High School, Cumberland, the Ozanam Centre has provided an insight into the work that Vincentians do for some eager and enthusiastic young adults.

The Centre has also linked up with next door neighbours, The Zen Den, who provide hot coffees for service users each week and have adopted their own "Pay It Forward" system where customers can donate a coffee when paying for their own.

The Ozanam Centre is open on Mondays between 11am and 1pm for clothing donation – men's clothing

only at present.

Meanwhile the annual mass to pray for the canonisation of SVDP founder Blessed Frederic Ozanam will take place in St Mungo's church Townhead, on Monday 25th April at 7:30 pm.

The Mass will be celebrated by SVDP's Archdiocesan Spiritual Director Fr William Monaghan and St Mungo's parish priest Fr Frank Keevins.

To contact the Centre, please email: ozanamcentreglasgow@gmail.com

■ Sean Murphy is president of Our Lady of the Wayside Conference at the Ozanam Centre



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