

ABM Speakers' Corner



Issue One, March 2014



ABM acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of this land; and the Elders both past and present, who have contributed to the life journey of all.

Speakers' Prayer

Almighty God, as we engage with our ABM family and friends around Australia, may the gifts that you have taught us give us the confidence to spread your word and bring our work into the hearts of all Australians. Through Jesus Christ, Our Lord.

Amen

A LENTEN WELCOME

A very warm welcome to your first edition of Speakers' Corner for 2014. Your feedback is always most welcome.

Thank you for your hard work, tireless efforts and support of ABM -we really can't do it without you.

Yours in Christ.

Michael Robinson

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THE POINT OF LENTEN DISCIPLINES

The season of Lent extends for forty days from Ash Wednesday. If you don't count the Sundays as days of abstinence, because we don't fast when the bridegroom is with us on the Lord's Day, forty days brings you neatly to Easter Saturday. If you don't believe me that these Sundays are officially free of Lenten disciplines, note that the Prayer book and the Lectionary refer to these as *Sundays in Lent*, not *Sundays of Lent* (i.e. not like the Sundays of Advent, Epiphany and Easter). The season excludes the Sundays, though there are seasonal readings and liturgical observations on the Sundays.

The three traditional Lenten disciplines are fasting, almsgiving and prayer, as our readings at the Ash Wednesday Eucharist suggest, also suggesting the motive for these actions. Lent is a penitential season during which the Church prepares for Easter. We resurrection people, we liberation people, have Lent as a gift from God for honest self-appraisal, for facing down the temptations that make us less than the disciples of Christ that we were called and baptized to be. So in Christ and through Christ, during Lent we prepare to meet Christ at Easter.

Lent isn't primarily about abstinence, then, and it's certainly not an arbitrarily focussed exercise in willpower or self-improvement. It's not a marathon concentrating on our own performance and self-denial. We abstain for a different reason: to deepen our prayer and to free-up resources that we can then give away.

How might we understand the Lenten emphasis on fasting today? I'm struck by the new culture of food in our society. You can find apartments in New York nowadays with no kitchen. Our current obsession with food porn on television points to food losing its central role in real life. We lurch between idealizing and romanticizing food, on the one hand, and demonizing it on the other. Food becomes the enemy of health and fitness for many people, with today's new morality concerned with calorific rather than sexual excess. So whatever fasting used to mean, it has to mean something different today.

Up to the mid-twentieth century in Australia, and still in many societies, food preparation was a major part of every day for women, so fasting was as much to do with reducing domestic labour as it was about going without food. Fasting freed women from hours in the kitchen, bringing time to rest, to be alone, to be together, to pray, to visit the Blessed Sacrament. Today, fasting makes less sense when food is often hastily prepared and shovelled down by distracted individuals, perhaps independently of others in the household. I suggest that skinny gym goers should not be fasting in Lent. Likewise, people with little interest in food and drink who give it up for Lent risk missing the point.

A new trend today sees fasting in terms of the things that really preoccupy people: social networks, web browsing, constant groping of the smart phone, and texting even while you're talking with other people face to face. Lent can be an opportunity to face the emptiness, restlessness, neediness and personal insecurity that such behaviours reveal. Solitude and real engagement, prayer and real fellowship, are things we might rediscover in a Lent free of such devices.

A student told me recently that in her household she finally wrangled some family time together only to find that spouse and children all brought along their wireless devices and resisted relinquishing them. Maybe in a Lent of IT fasting, families could pray a simple evening office together, play scrabble, go for a walk, visit an elderly relative, read a book, or attend a parish study group. Abstinence is not for Sundays, however, when we can have a breakout, and perhaps start learning to use those devices without being dominated by them. Or what about wearing less makeup in Lent? Or having a fast on going shopping, limiting our discretionary expenditure, while embracing some charity as a family project to which we'll all devote the money we save?



The right sort of Lenten abstinence, marked by prayer and personal generosity, can bring us to the point of penitence, of new resolutions, traditionally to the practice of confession in Holy Week, and thus to the experience of Easter as focussed disciples rather than work-and-consumption-gluttled escapists, hanging out for our Easter getaway.

Acknowledgement: Dr Scott Cowdell

RENEWING OUR DISCIPLESHIP

Lent is a forty-day period before Easter, beginning on Ash Wednesday. Lent has long been the primary time to renew our discipleship by adopting some discipline to heighten our spiritual awareness. The idea of discipline relates to the experience of being a disciple. The disciple is a learner, and discipline is the way of learning. It includes instruction for the mind and exercises for the body. The traditional Lenten disciplines are fasting, prayer and almsgiving but there are many other disciplines that we can practice including study, solitude, and simplicity.

The forty days

The church has always had times of fasting, penitence and preparation. In the early church the custom of fasting before Easter was practiced, initially for only a few days at a time. It also became the tradition to set aside a time of preparation for catechumens, who would undergo a rigorous period of instruction, reflection self-denial, scrutiny and prayer in order to become candidates for baptism. The church eventually decided on a forty-day period for Lent as a reminder of the forty-day period of Jesus' fast in the desert. It also recalls other forty-day or forty-year times of significance in Jewish history:

- Noah and the forty days of rain;
- Moses' fasting for forty days before receiving the Ten Commandments;
- The Israelites' wandering for forty years;
- Elijah's travelling for forty days to reach God's holy mountain.

These experiences were occasions of spiritual cleansing and preparation to encounter God in a new way. The forty-day period of Lent excludes Sundays, which are considered little Easters, feast days that celebrate Jesus' resurrection on the first day of the week.

Lenten practice in our worship services

In our worship, we mark the season of Lent in these ways:

- We use the colour purple. Purple signifies great solemnity, penance and royal dignity.
- We don't use flowers to decorate the sanctuary.
- In place of the *Gloria*, which is normally recited at the beginning of the service, we use the *Trisagion* — "Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal, have mercy on us."
- We use the Lenten invitation to confession, thanksgiving preface, post-communion prayer and blessing.

Acknowledgement: Dennis Bratcher



ASH WEDNESDAY

Ash Wednesday is the day Lent begins. It occurs forty days before Good Friday and originated in the A.D. 900s. Ash Wednesday is actually its colloquial name. Its official name is the Day of Ashes. It is called Ash Wednesday because, being forty days before Good Friday, it always falls on a Wednesday and it is called Ash Wednesday because on that day at church the faithful have their foreheads marked with ashes in the shape of a cross.

In the Bible a mark on the forehead is a symbol of a person's ownership. By having their foreheads marked with the sign of a cross, this symbolizes that the person belongs to Jesus Christ, who died on a Cross. This is in imitation of the spiritual mark or seal that is put on a Christian in baptism, when he is delivered from slavery to sin and the devil and made a slave of righteousness and Christ (Rom. 6:3-18).

Ashes are a biblical symbol of mourning and penance. In Bible times the custom was to fast, wear sackcloth, sit in dust and ashes, and put dust and ashes on one's head. They also symbolize death and so remind us of our mortality. Thus when the priest uses his thumb to sign one of the faithful with the ashes, he says, "Remember, man, that thou art dust and unto dust thou shalt return."

The ashes are made by burning palm fronds which have been saved from the previous year's Palm Sunday, they are then blessed by a priest — blessed ashes having been used in God's rituals since the time of Moses (Numbers 19:9-10, 17).



Contact List

This list only contains people who have given ABM written permission to have their contact details published. To be included, please email your details to Michael Robinson (see address below).

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<i>Canberra</i>	<i>The Rev'd Rebecca Newland</i>
<i>Grafton</i>	<i>Helen Newton</i>
<i>Melbourne</i>	<i>Mr Brett Collins</i>
<i>Newcastle</i>	<i>The Rev'd Canon Katherine Bowyer</i>
<i>Perth</i>	<i>The Ven. Lionel Snell</i>
<i>Rockhampton</i>	<i>Mrs Sybil Pawley</i>
<i>SA Province</i>	<i>The Right Rev'd David McCall</i>
<i>Sydney</i>	<i>Mrs Edwina Waddy</i>
<i>Tasmania</i>	<i>The Rev'd Warwick Cuthbertson</i>

List of Resources

For Education and Publicity

- Prayer Diary
- Project Book
- Partners' Magazine
- Annual Report
- ABM DVDs
- Partner Brochures
- Magnets
- Posters (Marks of Mission, Country overview)
- Banners

For Fundraising

- Duplex (Giving) envelopes
- Purses
- Lanyards
- Bequest Forms
- Crosses

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