



8th Sunday of the Year and Ash Wednesday 2 and 5 March 2025

Reflection by Mgr Daniel McHugh

“Shine as lights in the world” (Philippians 2:15)

Years ago I was happy to have the opportunity to visit Trinidad in the Caribbean at Carnival time. I was not on holiday but going to different islands in the West Indies to get to know the homelands of the immigrants from the Caribbean I had been tasked with ministering to. I have to confess though that it was no accident that I started in Trinidad before moving on to the other islands: it is famous for its Carnival time before Lent begins. I can still recall the sound of the drums and the music as people danced through the streets: at the end of it all you were in no doubt that the party was over as the season of Lent and self-denial began. Sadly we don't have anything like it here: the closest we get observing Lent is about to begin as a country is Shrove Tuesday and our famous pancakes! In other parts of Europe our Catholic roots are more obvious with Carnival underway for weeks. The Protestant rejection of such partying has left its mark in England!

Despite his serious illness Pope Francis has issued a message for Lent 2025 in which he *“invites the faithful to journey together in hope”*, and to take the opportunity of the upcoming Lenten season to ask ourselves whether we are truly willing to heed God's call to change our lives. On Wednesday, the day the season of Lent begins, we make a point of going to Church for the ceremony of Imposition of Ashes, which usually takes place during Mass, but these days we can sometimes be at a Ceremony outside Mass where the usual Scripture Readings are proclaimed and the ritual of Blessing and Distribution of Ashes takes place. We are reminded of our mortality when the Blessed Ashes are placed on our heads in the form of a cross with the words: *“Remember you are dust and to dust you will return”*. The Cross is also a sign of the victory we celebrate on Good Friday. Alternative words used at the imposition of ashes are *“turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel”*. The readings for Ash Wednesday call us to a change of heart and teach us about the traditional Lenten practices of prayer, fasting and alms giving: the Loyola Press Commentary says *“These disciplines are part of the Christian life during every season, but during the season of Lent, we renew our commitment to them.”*

Pope Francis' message for Lent has at its heart the theme of 'conversion' and he emphasizes the importance of journeying together in hope, so linking this Lent to the Jubilee Year. He urges us to examine our way of life and discover what God is asking of us. He writes: *“The Holy Spirit impels us not to remain self-absorbed, but to keep walking towards God and our brothers and sisters”*.

Monsignor Daniel McHugh

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The scripture readings for the 8th Sunday of the Year are a good focus for our preparation to begin Lent on Ash Wednesday. The Gospel in the third and final section of St Luke's Sermon on the Plain and the Parables there lead us to consider how to be a good disciple. Before you can be a good disciple you have to learn from the 'teacher' of course, Loyola Press Sunday Connection commentary says: *"Before you can be a good disciple and teach others you must take care of yourself. Do not take a speck out of your brother's eye until you have taken "the log" out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly the speck that is in your brother's eye."*

Like those refugees and asylum seekers in our own day are fleeing situations of misery and violence in search of a better life for themselves and their loved ones, so we in Lent are journeying together in search of a better way of living, one that is more centered on the way taken by Jesus Himself, involving turning away from self as St Paul says in the second reading for the 8th Sunday: *"always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labour is not in vain."*

We are blessed to have a special example placed before us this weekend as each of us seeks to model ourselves more closely on the Way of Jesus, that is St Chad, Patron of the Archdiocese. He was known for the simple life he lived travelling on foot in his pastoral work. St Bede wrote of Chad *"he administered his diocese in great holiness of life, following the example of the ancient fathers."* We ask his prayers that we may grow more like the Lord Jesus this Lent inspired by his dedication, his discipleship. May we too "shine as lights in the world", supported by the whole Church community.

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