



Dear Friends in Christ,

Warmest blessings at the commencement of the liturgical season of Lent.

One of the most privileged moments in my life was to be able stand very close to Michelangelo's sculpture *The Pietà* which is housed in St Peter's Basilica. The sculpture depicts Mary, the Mother of God, embracing the lifeless body of her son. The statue is translucent and Michelangelo has carved in marble, as if human flesh, this moment of profound grief of a mother for her son; Mary Our Mother in holding her Son holds all of us.

In Michelangelo's image Mary sits cradling the draped body of Jesus. She holds him closely to herself in a gesture of intense pain and at the same time, she holds him toward the observer as pure and utter gift. She holds Jesus and at the same time she holds us too. Her grief is tangible but, in the echo of the rich scriptural tradition, she also holds the gift of the promise of God in whom she has placed her trust. Her son, who once proclaimed the Kingdom of God, who healed, reconciled, forgave, liberated, nourished, prayed, summoned followers and washed their feet, is now lifeless. The crucified Son of God is silent, his life outpoured. The *Pietà* moves many to tears as they ponder the magnificent masterpiece which both invites them into the mystery of the death of Christ and into their own memories of deep loss and grief. In faith we know that this silent grief will be transformed by the promise of resurrection.



As we enter the liturgical season of Lent, we begin anew the journey of personal conversion through prayer, fasting and charity. We know the story of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, not as some historical event but as one we recognise in our own lives, in the story we bear, we live, and we breathe. We undertake this same journey each year with the hope of our renewal as people of faith and followers of Jesus. As we approach these holy forty days, we dare to embark on this spiritual journey which allows us to centre our lives more fully on Jesus and to commit ourselves to the mission of the Good News entrusted to us.

MOST REVEREND GREGORY BENNET BISHOP OF SALE

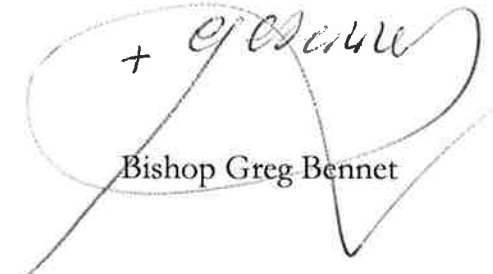
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As we reflect upon the Word of God during this time we become acutely aware of the call of the desert places, mountains, and valleys of our lives. In finding time to pray, to be still, we bring our experience before the Word which enlightens, transforms and interprets our lived experience through the lens of the life, passion, death and resurrection of Jesus. Through our fasting we hunger more fully for One who truly satisfies our hearts and in our sharing, we learn more fully to receive.

As we embark on our Lenten journey this year, mindful of all we have experienced throughout the pandemic, we might be asking ourselves: what am I going to do, or what haven't I done enough of and need to seek penance for this year? Perhaps we might set a time each day to pray, to sit with the Word of God and to be still. Rather than "giving something up" we might choose to "take something up" like visiting those we have not seen, writing a letter or email to those who are alone or giving someone a call. Through our fasting and acts of charity we may ensure that others may experience joy and have their lives enriched by kindness. Our mindfulness of those in need, so beautifully expressed through Caritas Project Compassion, is one pathway to strengthen the lives of others. In so many creative ways we can participate in the mission of the Church to go beyond ourselves in order to see others as our brothers and sisters united in our common humanity.

Lent commences with the sprinkling of ashes upon us, symbolising the love to which we are called. A love which purifies, refines and calls us to new birth through the waters of baptism. Michelangelo allowed the work of his hands, his prayer and his faith to create the *Pietà* through which we behold the vision of the Son of God who assumed our humanity, humbling himself to the point of death on a cross, and who has been exalted by God and given the name above all other names (Philippians 2:9). May this Lenten time enable us to come close to him and allow him to transform our dying into life.

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Bishop Greg Bennet