

ASH WEDNESDAY

Last Sunday, I promised you some advice from one of my heroes! Michael Ramsey was the 100th Archbishop of Canterbury. At the start of one New Year, he wrote these words to his clergy, advising them how to approach the 12 months ahead. Reading the words, I was struck by the homely wisdom which may be useful to any follower and servant of Christ and, I suggest, for this new, spring-time Season of the Year, Lent: “

1. Thank God. Often and always. Thank him carefully and wonderingly for your continuing privileges and for every experience of his goodness. Thankfulness is a soil in which pride does not easily grow.
2. Take care about confession of your sins. As time passes the habit of being critical about people and things grows more than each of us realise.
3. Be ready to accept humiliations. They can hurt terribly but they can help to keep you humble. Whether trivial or big, accept them he says. All these can be so many chances to be a little nearer to Our Lord. There is nothing to fear, if you are near to the Lord and in his hands.
4. Do not worry about status. There is only one status that Our Lord bids us be concerned with, and that is our proximity to Him. “If a man serve me, let him follow me, and where I am there also shall my servant be.” (John 12.26) That is our status; to be near our Lord wherever He may ask us to go with him.

5. Use your sense of humour. Laugh at things, laugh at the absurdities of life, laugh at yourself.

Through the year people will thank God for you. And let the reason for their thankfulness be not just that you were a person whom they liked or loved but because you made God real to them.”

I do not expect you to remember these 5 wonderful ‘tips’ but please do remember that this homily, (like every Sunday), is posted on our church website for you to refer to and ponder - or even wrestle with! Lent is a good time to wrestle with what is at the heart of our CREDO, what we believe, and the kind of journey we are all on... which will lead us to Easter.

Of today, Ash Wednesday, and this beginning of Lent, Bishop Martin’s last letter to us said: “This is a time when we are brought once again face to face with our frailty and our mortality, and so with our utter dependence on God. I would encourage you to spend time thinking, praying, reflecting, listening to God through Scripture, reading and meditation, to discern what God is calling us to in this strange season. This is surely a time for discernment, prayerful and careful discernment, to align with God’s call and will which is always a call and will to love, to healing, to reconciliation.

I encourage you to spend deliberate and intentional time praying for ourselves and our world, seeking God. (Bishop Martin said)...The phrase that has been ringing in my ears for the past couple of months is “pray more, do less”, not, I hasten to add, just as retirement advice, but as words for the

Church. That will mean different things to each of us, but at the heart it is about genuinely listening to God.”

Finally, and the highlight of tonight’s liturgy, are those sobering words as you are marked with the cross tonight, in ash: ‘Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return. Turn away from sin, and be faithful to Christ.’

But they are compelling words and true, are they not? They make us stronger, more forgiving and compassionate, as children of God, children of Everlasting Hope and Mercy, when – hand in hand - we follow the Way of the Cross together.

Amen.