

Rector's Letter.
Entering Lent, 2019

Dear Friends,

When we celebrated Candlemas in St Mary's on February 3rd, and the liturgy for that day stated that now we were turning away from Christmas towards Lent and Passiontide, Lent still seemed an awful long way away; but now it's almost crept up on us! We begin, as usual, with our traditional **Eucharist with the Imposition of Ashes on Ash Wednesday**, 6th March at 6 pm. But the Sunday before that, March 3rd, at the 10 o'clock service, we shall be keeping '**Church Action on Poverty Sunday**', with many churches of different denominations throughout the country. It will be a time, just before some of us begin to 'give things up' for Lent, to think about people who have no choice about 'going without', and what this must be like. I know that in the last couple of years, several prominent Christians have kept Lent by restricting their expenditure on food etc. to what a person on benefits has to live on, and they've found it very difficult and dull – much harder than giving up chocolate or booze for 6 weeks! Although I'm not advocating that any of you (or I) should necessarily do this, I think it will be good to enter Lent with a real awareness of what being poor means, but also with the hopeful message of how people have been helped by *Church Action on Poverty* to feel more in control of their lives.

Later in Lent, on March 24th, Pam Richardson will be sharing a similar message with us about people being helped out of poverty overseas, through the work of *Christian Aid*. This will be in support of the **Bishop of Ely's Lent Appeal**, which this year focuses on how Christian Aid's partners in several countries are helping women to create sustainable futures for themselves their families and communities, through business. This appeal will also be the financial object of our **Lent Lunches** this year (see separate advertising on pew sheet and notice board).

As well as being a time for giving, and giving-up, Lent is also traditionally a time for deepening our faith and prayer, and our understanding of the Gospel and its claims on our lives. It's appropriate, therefore, that our revived **Parish Prayer Group** begins just before Lent – a monthly meeting on Saturday morning in the Pavilion, with a simple breakfast and an opportunity to pray with others for the life and work of St Mary's. There's so much going on – it could certainly do with being supported in prayer if it's to be fruitful for God's purposes. Please join us on Saturday, March 2nd, at 8.30 am, and then subsequently on first Saturdays of each month. If you can't come to the Prayer Group, please support the Church's work anyway, by praying at home for all the events and activities mentioned on our pew sheets.

For **our individual Lenten devotions**, an anonymous donor has very kindly purchased for our church and other churches in the Team, (and for anyone else in the parishes who might be interested), copies of '*Reflections on The Beatitudes*' by Steven Croft, the Bishop of Oxford. These beautifully produced booklets contain a suggested passage of Scripture to read each day, a *very* short reflection, and simple suggestions for prayer and follow-up action. Ideal for busy people, these reflections are surprisingly deep, and, used thoughtfully, will help you enter more fully into understanding and living the life which Jesus described as 'blessed' in the Sermon on the Mount. Please feel free just to pick one of the booklets up from the back of the Church for yourself, or anyone you think would benefit from it. Our kind donor has generously ensured that there are plenty available.

You will see that '*Reflections on the Beatitudes*' advertises a further booklet, for use between Easter and Ascension Day – '*Reflections on the Lord's Prayer*'. As many of you will remember, for the past few years the 9 days between Ascension and Pentecost Sunday has been designated as '**Thy Kingdom Come**' season., when the Archbishops have invited us all to pray intentionally for the spread of the Gospel, and for more people to come to know God personally, through Jesus. If you decide to go on and use '*Reflections on the Lord's Prayer*' after Easter, this would be a very good preparation for that season. If you

think you would like to buy *'Reflections on the Lord's Prayer'*, please let me know, and I will put in a bulk order so that we get a slight reduction on the (very reasonable) price – down from £2.99 to £2.50 each!

Another thing which can help us with the intention of the 'Thy Kingdom Come' season is our programme of **Lent Groups** this year, which will be using material from a book called *'Sharing Faith the Jesus Way'*, written several years ago by Jim Currin, a Church Army evangelist, to help ordinary Christians like you and me with that issue which so many of us find thorny and difficult – how to talk about our faith appropriately, sensitively and yet confidently to the people around us, with the hope and prayer that they may be attracted to Christ. Many of us (and I include myself) tend to duck out of doing this out of embarrassment, or the fear of being challenged and then finding ourselves tongue-tied; yet the spread of the Gospel can't rely on lived examples alone. Many people in the world are good and kind, without any faith in God.. And often we, as Christians, are painfully aware that we're not good and kind all the time – so we can't totally rely on our behaviour to point people to the *unfailing* goodness and kindness of God: words sometimes have to be used! And, in particular situations and particular relationships, *you* may be the only person in a position to use them, however difficult you find it. So, our Lent Course is being held to help us find ways of sharing our faith appropriately and effectively, and to build us up in courage and find our voice when opportunities are presented.

Members of the Ministry Team will be leading these groups:

- on Tuesday Evenings from 7.30 – 9 in the Pavilion, Pam Richardson will lead;
- on Wednesday evenings from 7.30 – 9 at 1 Green Lane, Cathy and David Watts will lead;
- on Thursday morning after Communion at around 10.35, I will lead;
- on Friday mornings in Nichols Court from 10.15 – 11.30, Sue Filby will lead.

Please note that the Thursday and Friday groups will start in the same week as Ash Wednesday (on 7th and 8th March, respectively), while the Tuesday and Wednesday groups will start in the following week (on 14th and 15th March, respectively)

Please be bold, and sign up for groups at the back of St Mary's. You don't need to buy a copy of *'Sharing Faith the Jesus Way'*, as your leader will have course material available for you based on extracts from it. However, I have, or can get, a few copies of the book, available at a reasonable price or to lend; please let me know if you'd like to own it or read it in full.

Much else is happening, too. Please pray for our new enterprise of a monthly Youth Group for young people aged 9-13, beginning on March 3rd, as well as for the 'Baby Steps' course in Lent for parents with very young children, for Messy Church and Wild Church, for 'Space for the Spirit', and for our all-age keeping of Mothering Sunday on 31st March with a 'Together with God' service (transferred from March 24th), and all our regular work and worship. But, above all, please enter Lent eager to be challenged and strengthened anew in your faith, and made even more fit for our Lord's service through the work of his Spirit, filled with joy and hope in believing.

With assurance of my prayers for you all,

Maggie.