

## Lenten Reflection 2023

When I was ordained a deacon one of the life changes I experienced was how this new identity imposed a heightened experience of seasonal rhythm on my time. You and I are very versed with the cycle of liturgy and public worship in the Catholic Church. It is a familiar liturgical calendar that divides each church year into six seasons, each season emphasising a different part of the life of Jesus Christ. As the Vatican's Congregation for Divine Worship puts it rather succinctly, "*By means of the yearly cycle the Church celebrates the whole mystery of Christ, from his incarnation until the day of Pentecost and the expectation of his coming again.*" Now you may ask what exactly is the 'mystery of Christ', and I might reply, (hopefully not taken as flippancy); well if I knew, it wouldn't be a mystery would it? We can perhaps speak more easily about mystery by looking at our relationships with others, do we ever get to a time where we can really "know" another person completely and absolutely, can we ever fully appreciate the depth, the beauty, the pain, the joy, the reality of who that other person is? Human life itself is a mystery, and, despite revelation, there are aspects of God that will remain mystery until God chooses to fully reveal God. This is not to say that we are helpless in this endeavour; which brings me to the purpose of the Lenten Season. You and I have been gifted forty days to especially prepare for the Easter Season, and in fact all the Seasons to follow as there is a clear continuity of purpose. We are invited to fast, abstain from certain things, pray, attend Mass, and practice good deeds and almsgiving. One of our overarching goals is to further reveal in our lives the nature of Christ and His mission for humankind. I didn't want to focus today on things such as the do's and don'ts of Lent, the Lenten Regulations, etc, these are freely available elsewhere, I would however recommend a five minutes read of '*Lent a guide for the perplexed*' available on the Archdiocesan website;

<https://melbournecatholic.org/news/lent-a-guide-for-the-perplexed>.

I just wanted to take the time to finish this short reflection by sharing a story reported by the Catholic News Service back in April 2018. It is available on *You Tube* and it never fails to move me. I think about it this

time of the year because it reminds me so strongly of how I view God's love. But to the story.....

The Holy Father was making a visit to the St. Paul of the Cross parish outside Rome. A boy called Emanuele, approached the microphone during a question-and-answer session with children of the parish. Emanuele can be seen smiling at the Pope in a video before freezing and saying, *"I can't do it,"* and then he starts crying.

The pope summoned the young boy to come to him. *"Come, come to me, Emanuele,"* Francis said. *"Come and whisper it in my ear."* The tearful boy summoned up the courage to approach the Pope. A papal aide helped the boy up to the platform where the Holy Father sat. Then Holy Father lovingly embraced him. Their heads touching, the pope and boy spoke privately before Emanuele returned to his seat. After asking permission, Pope Francis shared the boy's question with the gathering. Emanuele had asked the Holy Father this question;

*"A little while ago my father passed away. He was a nonbeliever, but he had all four of his children baptised,... He was a good man. Is my dad in heaven?"*

Pope Francis spoke to the crowd; *"That man did not have the gift of faith, he wasn't a believer, but he had his children baptised. He had a good heart."* Then he turned to all the children in the crowd and asked if they thought God would abandon a father like Emanuele's, who was a good man. The children shouted back in unison: "No!" *"There, Emanuele: That is the answer,"* the pope said.

The reality is that we do not know all that much about heaven. We do not fully understand the mystery of Christ, but we do accept and trust that God is love. I would think that it is very unlikely for Love, true Love, the very source of all Love, to be unloving.

This Lenten season and every season we are invited to repent, turn back to God and believe the Good News, we should know that God simply desires to embrace those hurting in our world, just loving and being present to their wounded hearts. This too is our mission.