



Dear Friends,

We are now in the season of Lent. It seems as if only yesterday it was Advent! Over the last few weeks, when I've been thinking about Lent, the two words that spring to mind are endurance and passion. Endurance or perseverance or 'keeping on keeping on' has been the hallmark of many faithful people committed to reconciliation, to peace, to making a difference in our community over the last forty years. In the last few weeks we have seen some major breakthroughs for which they struggled, worked and prayed. Devolved government in Northern Ireland is on a surer foundation. Insofar as decommissioning of weapons is a step towards lasting peace, all of the major protagonists in the conflict of the past years have now committed themselves, leaving only those dissident groups that may never fully go away. The decommissioning of minds and hearts, not only here but in all areas of conflict in the world, is a much slower process. It requires years of keeping on building relationships, a willingness to be open, to risk being vulnerable and having, at very least, as its goal, the recognition of a common humanity. We haven't reached there yet. We still have a long way to go – and endurance isn't a glory word. There is no kudos attached to it, but it's a vital ingredient in any peace making process. It's a commitment word, a costly word, a hard decision-making word, a stretching word, an often hidden but essential word for those who would number themselves among the friends and followers of Jesus. In fact, it's a Jesus word! It is a definitive quality for all who seek to walk the Lenten road of hard choices with an outrageous hope in their hearts and a conviction that the best is yet to be. In this kairos time for our community, for the Church and for the world, perhaps we need to nurture and encourage the spirit of endurance and pray that it might be accompanied by at least a small measure of joy!

Endurance is something we cultivate and work at, hopefully growing stronger as we go, whereas passion is something that captures or seizes us, and is full of intensity and desire. Jesus embodied the passion in the heart of God to bring an orphaned world back home. His passionate love for the Father and his resulting compassion for others directed, motivated and shaped every part of his life. It cost him everything. He said, "I have come to bring fire to the earth, and I wish that my task were already completed. There is a terrible baptism ahead of me, and I am under a heavy burden until it is accomplished." His focus was always on the purpose for which he had come and from the cross he was able to shout with his last breath, "It is accomplished!" Whether people recognise it or not, from that point everything has forever changed. All things become possible – through, with and in Jesus Christ, crucified and risen.

Do we believe that? Is that our passion? If it is, where are the voices to utter it and the actions to proclaim it? Where are our prophets of hope, not only for Ireland but for the world? Passion is a heart word, a love making word, an embracing word. It's a Jesus word. Dare we allow ourselves to be so seized by our passion for God and resulting compassion for others that we become image bearers of Jesus, of his unflinching love and faithfulness, committed to mercy, justice, truth and peace, even though it may cost us dear?

Endurance without passion is a joyless thing. Passion without endurance can be fickle. They need each other and we need both if we make the hard choice to walk with Jesus along the Lenten Road. Our situations, the challenges that face us, our faith experience will all be different, but if the underlying commitment is the same, then we are companions on a journey that does not end in tragedy and loss, but leads to rekindled hope, resurrection and restoration. So wherever you are in the world, travel well – with endurance and passion – this Lent.

A Lenten Reflection

Give up complaining—focus on gratitude.

Give up pessimism—become an optimist.

Give up harsh judgments—think kindly thoughts.

Give up worry—trust Divine Providence.

Give up discouragement—be full of hope.

Give up bitterness—turn to forgiveness.

Give up hatred—return good for evil.

Give up negativism—be positive.

Give up anger—be more patient.

Give up pettiness—become mature.

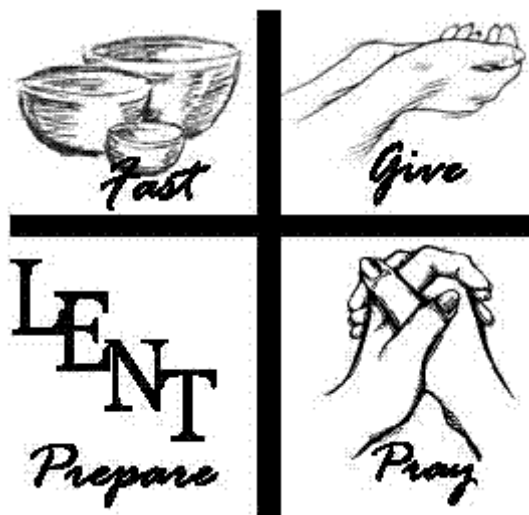
Give up gloom—enjoy the beauty that is all around you.

Give up jealousy—pray for trust.

Give up gossiping—control your tongue.

Give up sin—turn to virtue.

Give up giving up—hang in there!



Monthly Meeting

February 22nd at 8.00 pm

'You are Witnesses' continued.

Facilitator: Rev Ruth Patterson

Lenten Day of Reflection

Restoration House

February 20th - 2.00 pm - 6.00 pm

The title for this day is:

Outrageous Hope

Facilitator: Rev Ruth Patterson

All Welcome

RIP

We are greatly saddened to hear of the deaths of two of our 'Friends.'

Fr Jim Burke, an American Dominican, who was so faithful in his visits to Ireland throughout all the years of conflict and with his gentle spirit and unshakeable trust in the grace and love of God brought such encouragement to many in this island.

Mrs Esther Mayne from Enniskillen, who has been on our mailing list for many years, a lady of deep faith who lived life to the full.

We extend our sympathy to Fr Jim's community and for Esther's family and pray for the Lord's comfort and the hope that comes from Jesus Christ, crucified and risen.

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