

LUX EDMUNDI: REFLECTION: FEBRUARY, 2015

We are in the First Week of the Liturgical Season of Lent, when, with the Lord before us, we are led by the Spirit into the desert – into the “God-less”, barren parts of ourselves and of our lives - to engage in what the Collect for Ash Wednesday calls “*militia Christiana*”, our “campaign of Christian service”, our struggle “against ... the world rulers of the present darkness, against the spirit forces of evil in the heavenly regions (*Ephesians 6:12*)”.

Lent is the season of *metanoia*. The lexicographers tell us that, in the secular sources of the day, this word connoted “a change of mind”, bore “a nuance of ‘remorse’ (as regret for shortcomings and errors)”, “with focus on the need of change in view of responsibilities to deity”. In the New Testament, it means “repentance, turning about, conversion”. It entails a turning from and a turning towards, a complete re-orientation of heart and life, from not-God to God, from created to Creator, from Satan to Christ, from darkness to light, death to life, evil to good, wrong to right, self to others. *Metanoia*, repentance, entails real, fundamental, decisive and lasting choices about who and what we are, about what really matters to us, about what drives us, guides us, and owns us.

We may also regard *metanoia* as the realisation of Baptism, the actualisation of our christening, of our “Christing”. It is the opening of our hearts to Christ, who always stands at the door and knocks (cf. *Apocalypse 3:20*), but who, in this blessed season, directly and insistently pleads with us to admit the Spirit to those bits of us that stubbornly remain unconverted, resistant to the saving, healing, “whole-ing”, grace of God.

Lent is a God-given opportunity for renewal in Christ Jesus, for “re-creation” by the Spirit, ever hovering over the depths of the human heart (cf. *Genesis 1:2*), to give light and life where otherwise there is, and can only be, death and darkness. The traditional ways of marking Lent, of manifesting repentance and of fostering renewal, are prayer, fasting and alms-deeds. In Lent, we strive with God’s grace to do what we ought, to do it better and to do more: To pray as and when we ought (e.g., Sunday Mass) and to undertake additional acts of worship and piety (e.g., daily Mass, the Stations of the Cross); to control our appetites, by reducing and/or restricting consumption of whatever kind; to help the neighbour in her/his corporal and spiritual afflictions and deprivations.

To these, though, we might add the discipline of professional thoroughness, the discharge of the duties of our state in life to the very best of our ability. We have noted more than once the insistence in the Rule of the aboriginal and undivided Society of the Presentation, that perfection – our fullness of being in Christ - consists, not in doing the extraordinary, but in doing the ordinary extraordinarily well. Our daily tasks are the stuff of holiness and it is out of them that we are made in the Spirit a living sacrifice to the Lord. St. Paul exhorted the Corinthians to do all for the glory of God (I *Cor.* 10:31) and he reminded the Christian slaves of Colossae: “Whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord and not men (*Col.* 3:23)”. One of the most powerful ways in which we can protect and promote Catholic education is by making our schools centres of excellence in every respect. As millions do across the globe, including many non-Christians, the parents and the children of Ireland will beat a path to the doors of the Catholic school if they know that there they will have “simply the best”. They will have “the best” only if, individually and systematically, we provide it and that we will do only if we give of our very best in the discharge of every task and function in our working lives “at the chalk-face”. This, though, is not down to him or her, to them or us: It’s down to me!