

LUX EDMUNDI: REFLECTION: FEBRUARY – LENT, 2017

Wednesday, 1st March, 2017, is Ash Wednesday, the first day of the liturgical season of Lent which, as the *Irish Catholic Catechism for Adults* puts it, “is an annual period of forty days beginning on Ash Wednesday, which is set aside for penance, fasting and almsgiving in preparation for the coming celebration of Easter. It is modelled in part on the forty days that Jesus spent in the desert prior to beginning his public ministry. The penance, fasting and almsgiving are meant to help lead the believer to ongoing conversion and a deeper faith in the lord who redeemed us (pp. 559-560)”.

In the original Greek of the New Testament, the noun which recurs in the relevant passages is *metanoia*, which is often translated as “repentance”, “conversion”. To us, “repentance” may suggest “being sorry for one’s sins” and “conversion” is likely to suggest “changing from one religion or religious denomination to another”. *Metanoia* definitely requires that we have a genuine sorrow for our sins and that that sorrow be informed by a real purpose of amendment, by a real determination that, with the grace of God, we will not, in effect, fail God and/or the neighbour again. It is, in fact, this resolve to live hence-forth in Christ that indicates a more complete understanding of “conversion”. *Metanoia* entails a change of direction, a real, profound and enduring re-orientation of our thinking and saying and doing towards God and the neighbour. This may be, as in the case of St. Paul, an event. More often, though, it is a process, a gradual re-making by grace of our inner being in the image and likeness of the God by whom we were created, in the image and likeness of Christ in whom we have been re-created.

The Season of Lent is that in which we are especially called by grace to *make* time, to get back to basics, back to God, to look at ourselves in the light of his Face, to ascertain where, in fact, we stand with him, whether he is really and truly our Rising Sun, our True North.

For teachers, in general, for principals, in particular, the urgent too often takes precedence over the important. The urgent takes many forms: The teachers who rang in sick this morning, the student who has just been referred for an alleged act of gross misconduct, the one whose parents are right here in the office threatening to bring us to law if we do not get rid of this teacher or that. Each and all such circumstances must be addressed immediately. If, however, we are so immersed in the helter-skelter of everyday life in school that we take this to be the *raison d’être* of our professional lives, if we never take time to think - and, as leaders of Catholic schools, to pray - about what we do and why we do it, our professional vision will become impaired, and, the research literature assures us, our effectiveness as governors, managers and leaders will be inhibited to one degree or another.

Those who govern, manage and lead Catholic schools must deal with the urgent *and* attend to the important. They must not regard prayer and reflection as necessary for others but not for them. They must, in fact, in this – as in so much else – lead by example. Otherwise, they will do what “the gates of Hell” have, thus far, tried but failed to do, *viz.*, eviscerate our schools of their Catholicity.

“Come back to me with all your hearts”: This invitation is addressed this Lent to all who work in and for Catholic schools, most especially to those who govern, manage and lead them. It asks us to consider whether, in the cult of Know-How, we have, to the detriment of those we serve, neglected the Know-Why. “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me”.