

LIVERPOOL ARCHDIOCESAN CENTRE FOR EVANGELISATION

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Introduction to Mass and Homily preached by the Most Reverend Patrick Kelly, Archbishop of Liverpool, at Mass on the Friday after Ash Wednesday. 12.10 pm on Friday 19 February 2010 in St Werburgh's church, Birkenhead.

Introduction to Mass:

The fasting that will bring us blessing is the gift from the Word of the Lord we receive on this third day of Lent.

Homily:

'The time will come for the bridegroom to be taken away from them, and then they will fast.' At the ninth hour on a Friday afternoon a scourged, crowned, crucified man cried out: 'Eloi, eloi, lama sabachthani' and bowed his head and gave up his spirit. The bridegroom was taken from them. But on the third day he rose again: not a very long fast: hardly worth comparing with Lough Derg's three days fast and rock hard crusts and hot water laced with salt or sugar.

Why so much fuss about such a little fast and why bother putting it in the Gospels for all future generations to ponder? After all he is risen never more to die. He cannot be taken from us again.

I want to suggest the absence of the bridegroom is in fact one of Lent's blessings. And it is a fruit; I mean the sense of our Lord being absent, is one fruit of the great trio set before us on Wednesday: prayer, fasting, alms.

Prayer: I do not mean extra prayers: I mean prayers long enough for the atheist in us to come to the surface: prayer beyond comfortable and comforting words: beyond requests however wide-ranging: but silent prayer until its only purpose is because God is God: beyond all tranquillity and lowering of tension. In silence we can feel the bridegroom's absence: by fasting from comfortable, familiar prayer we are healed.

Fasting: by resisting distraction, TV, soaps, radio, noise: removing the things that distract us from the truth about aches deep in us, by allowing trappings of wedding feasts, the props, the placebos, the superficial anaesthetics, it seems as if there is no bridegroom for us, no wedding feast: but such fasting will bring us to the feast of him who for love of us descended into hell's isolation, bitterness, death and rose again.

And alms-giving: I mean that which goes beyond the first tugging at our hearts and gives double what we first thought of because: I see those in need in the truth of who God is and who they are. Beyond record fund raising: way beyond what looks good even for business: to the discovery how open a broken heart can be: a heart like his who had from a wedding feast in Cana to bring a wine of gladness that will never fail, love the unlovely until his heart broke and streams of living water flowed to renew the face of the earth.

Ends
19 February 2010