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PASTORAL LETTER

*To be read in all churches and chapels of the Archdiocese of Liverpool on
Sunday, 22 February 2009, the Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time.*

My dear people,

Please live Lent, as you will begin it on Ash Wednesday by disobeying Our Lord. On Ash Wednesday we will receive this command from him: 'When you fast, wash your face'. And Catholics will wear great smudges for all to see. Again, Our Lord will say: 'When you pray, go into your private room'. But I know that on Wednesday there will be the usual chaos in Dawson Street outside the Blessed Sacrament Shrine as people struggle to get out from the 12.10 Mass and get into the 1.10 Mass, blocking the pavement outside for all to see. And Our Lord will give the command on Ash Wednesday: 'When you give alms, your left hand must not know what your right hand is doing.' But I know in every possible way Cafod will publicise our annual Lenten Family Fast Day.

There are two reasons that will help us to see why we are so disobedient and choose to receive the call the Lord God speaks on Wednesday through the prophet Joel: 'Proclaim a solemn assembly, call the people together, assemble the elders, gather the children.'

This is the first: our whole life and living Lent is a very personal affair; it is unique for each one of us. But it is not private. We know that we are 'the body of Christ and individually members of it'. Our sign to those around us is not just what we do one by one. The sign is also meant to be our unity in our Lord; especially when the world suffers from fragmentation we are called by our Lord to bear witness by our unity. It is because we are called to be his one body that this is the pattern for our life: 'Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude; it does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.' That is the love poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit to make us, for all to see, one body, one spirit in Christ.

But there is another urgent reason for us to live this lent together. That is the economic situation. A couple of weeks ago Mr Brown said: there is no map showing the way that will solve the problems. That comment is at the same time both disturbing: no one knows what to do: but encouraging too: we cannot just go on as before. We could say: it needs renewal, healing, repentance. All Lenten words. And in such a situation we need each other: we need space for conversation, to share fears and anxiety; we need space to reflect on what we have taken for granted and what will need to change. Again a couple of weeks ago I heard the BBC Radio 4 programme, 'The bottom line'. And this was the main point in that week's programme: we all

know what the bottom line means; what is the economic cost. But it was surely good to hear one contributor say: 'I have been involved in some changing conversations: the bottom line was not just how much money will be made or lost; but questions such as: will it be good for the well-being of all our employees? Will it affect the environment? Is it secure for the long term? The bottom line is changing. And surely every Lent we review what is our bottom line, personally, as families, as parishes, as church.

One other reminder that we must be alert: A new phrase has been around for a couple of weeks: 'Quantitative Easing'. As far as I can tell it means: printing money. Once more I think of G.K.Chesterton's hymn, 'O God of earth and altar,' and the prayer that God will save us from 'lies of tongue and pen'. And to wrap up the printing of money as 'Quantitative Easing,' sounds like lying to me.

At such a time I want to suggest that the more we come together this Lent the more blest we will be and the more we will be able to be a blessing for others.

Come together, for example for daily Mass or for the Morning and Evening Prayer of the Church. I encourage religious communities across the diocese to assist in this, either by inviting others to join them where they live or by planning to pray their office in their local church so that others can join them there. To be seen doing all this is part of what Our Lord calls on us to do.

Again a poster has been prepared giving some of the many possibilities to attend talks this Lent. I am certain they will be enlightening, but at least as important at this time is that it will bring us together. I am giving one series and I will be attending as many of the others as I can; I hope I will not put off those doing them. But laughter too is part of our Lent; it is our springtime, it is renewal, it is our receiving this call from Saint Paul: 'Let us pursue what makes for peace and mutual upbuilding.'

And this was surely the atmosphere of the word of God we received today: From Isaiah: 'No need to recall the past, no need to think about what was done before. See, I am doing a new deed.' From Saint Paul: 'With the Son of God, Christ Jesus, it was always "Yes"'.

And I just wonder: when Our Lord said: 'Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, "Your sins are forgiven" or to say, "Get up, pick up your stretcher and walk?"' I suggest it is easier to say: 'stand up and walk,' than 'your sins are forgiven'. But Lent leads us to this fact proclaimed on Ash Wednesday: 'For our sake God made the sinless one into sin, so that in him we might become the goodness of God.' Indeed, nothing is impossible for the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. We will not be afraid but with one heart and mind and soul we will welcome lent, this joyful season, the gift of God who is love.

Yours devotedly in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Patrick Kelly". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Archbishop of Liverpool

Ends
22 February 2009