



Anglican Catholic Church



Diocese of the United Kingdom

Catholic Faith † Orthodox Worship † Apostolic Order

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My dear friends and colleagues,

Satan is the Master of Verbal Deceit. He loves to twist the meaning of words; he loves to play games with words – for the purpose of leading human beings into sin and eventually into hell!

He even tempts people to play games with their words in order to rationalize their sinful behaviour. And too often it works.



It all began in the Garden of Eden, when Eve said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; it is only about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden that God said, ‘You shall not eat it or even touch it, lest you die.’” How did the serpent respond?

He responded by twisting the meaning of God’s words, in order to lead Eve and her husband into sin! He said, in effect, “God didn’t mean that you would actually die! He just wants to hold you back and keep you down and crush the potential that you and Adam have as human beings!”

Then Satan played the ultimate word game to seal the deal and get Eve to take the big bite. He said, “If you eat this fruit, you’ll be like gods who *know* what is good and what is evil.”

The key word in that temptation, of course, is the word “know”. Yes, it’s true, God does know the difference between good and evil – as the devil said. But He knows it like I know the difference between good health and Covid-19. For me, Covid-19 is something that’s “out there”, because I don’t have the disease personally (thank goodness!). I know it exists; I don’t know it through experience!

God “knows” evil in the same way. It doesn’t touch His inner being; for Him, it’s always “out there”. But when Satan said to Eve, “If you eat this fruit, you’ll *know* evil too,” he secretly meant something very different. He was hoping that by eating it she would *experience* evil to the extent that it would cause misery and ruin her entire life.

This is why Satan is “the Master of Verbal Deceit”. Twisting the meaning of words is one of his despicable talents. And he’s still at it, in our generation, by getting people to redefine words and concepts in order to justify their actions. For example, think of how the word “freedom” has been redefined in recent years in order to justify everything that was once considered unacceptable. Think of how “rights” have been redefined in our civil laws without any reference to responsibility.

There are dozens of words that fit into this category: marriage (that used to mean one man and one woman); normal (so-called “normal behaviour” in 2021 is very different from what it was 50 years ago); the list goes on. So many words have been redefined in our culture and many have had the effect of dumbing deviancy down – making sin acceptable.

It’s a clever strategy on the part of the devil. And it will continue to work – as it worked with Adam and Eve – unless by the grace of God we resist and do our bit to put a stop to it, beginning in our own personal lives. Beginning this Lent.

The choice, as always, is ours. A blessed Lent to you all.

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Can Lent be considered a time of hope?

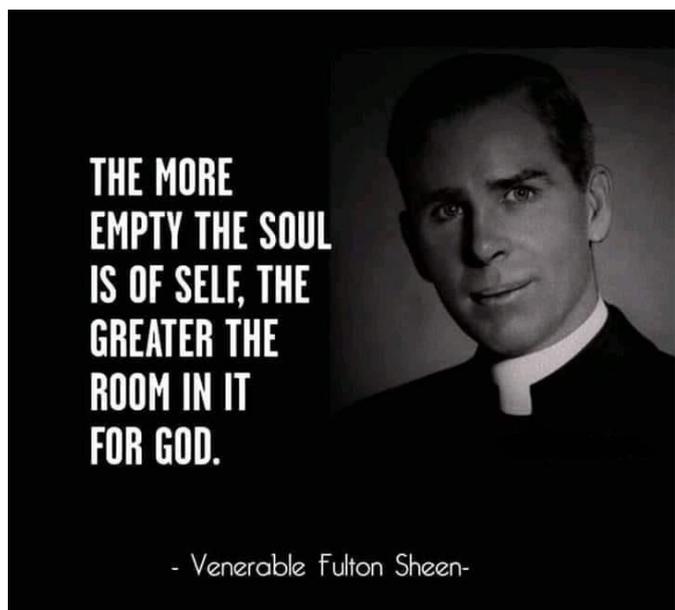
Is our hope for Lent that we will get it over with, that we will come to the end of it with a sigh of relief? It can, after all be a rather dreary time in many respects. We see Lent as an obstacle course we need to navigate in order to get to the great feast of Easter. But while the Lenten season is indeed preparation for our Easter celebration, the hope of this season is that we will find our lives transformed by the many ways we encounter God's Word, by the richness of the Scripture readings which encourage, challenge, confront and comfort. Focusing only on the end goal would cause us to miss so much along the way.

The greatest hope of Lent is the discovery that it's not only about penance, deprivation, spiritual struggles and rooting out sin in our lives. Those are certainly things we often do during Lent. And quite rightly so. But the hope of Lent lies in what *God* does.

We need to know that God's mercy and grace surround us not just in special times and places but always and everywhere. Lent is a time to discover the extraordinary in the ordinary, to be surprised by God's mercy when we least expect it. As the season begins, think about the hopes you have for Lent this year. Think about what changes you want to see in your life, in the world.

Lent comes to awaken us, to rouse us from slothfulness and inertia. The exhortation which the Lord addresses to us through the prophet Joel is strong and clear: "Turn ye even unto me with all your heart" (Joel 2:12). Why must we return to God? Because something is not right in us, not right in society, not right in the Church, and we need to change, to give it a new direction. Once again Lent comes to make its prophetic appeal, to remind us that it is possible to create something new within ourselves and around us, simply because God is always faithful, for He cannot deny Himself. He continues to be rich in goodness and mercy, and He is always ready to forgive and start afresh.

There's an oddly reassuring and attractive message about Lent now beginning in the middle of an ordinary week, catching us in the midst of our daily occupations and asking us to take time out to find God there. Lent doesn't take us away from our ordinary lives, but rather it invites us to bring a new and holy attention to our activities. This should be the way with all of our spiritual practices. We take time out so that we can return to our daily activities with new inspiration. God will always surprise us with possibilities when we least expect them. Let this Lent be one of those surprises.



(I have sometimes been asked if "the Island" I refer to really is an island! Yes, it is separated from the rest of Kent by a body of water called The Swale. My "profile" picture on the front is an aerial view of the bridges which connect us to the mainland. The lifting road and rail bridge was opened in 1960, replacing an earlier one, and the new crossing opened in 2006.)