



Anglican Catholic Church



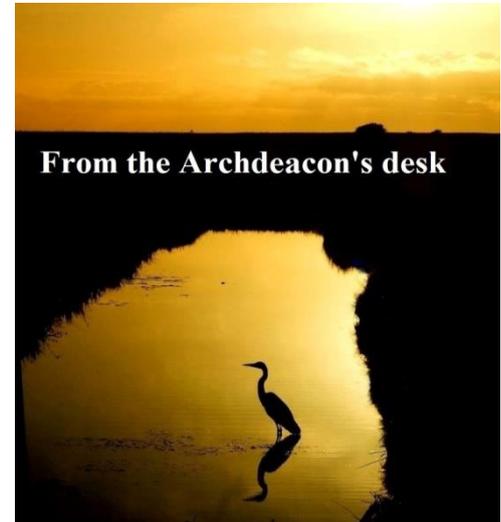
Diocese of the United Kingdom

Catholic Faith † Orthodox Worship † Apostolic Order

February 2022

My dear friends and colleagues,

One of the emphases of the upcoming Lenten texts that will re-enter our liturgy very soon is *repentance*. The Christian life is lived in a continuing cycle whereby the sin that comes through our fallen humanity is followed by the forgiveness assured by Christ through his Church and lived out most obviously in the sacraments of reconciliation and the Eucharist. This regular action of repentance and forgiveness is a reaffirmation of our baptism into the corporate nature of the Church. The sacrament of reconciliation is inextricably linked with the sacrament of baptism. At baptism, the candidate (either directly or through Godparents) promises to turn to Christ in repentance in sure and certain hope of the love of God. In Lent especially, then, we convert from our former ways, and “acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness”.



How then, do we convert through our liturgy? What does it mean to convert liturgically? The word *convert* stems from the Latin word *convertere* which means, literally, to turn around. When we convert, we turn to Christ – as we have promised to do at our baptism.

In the sacred liturgy we need to reflect this conversion in a powerful and clear symbol. In the Easter Vigil the congregation turns to face the font at the renewal of baptismal promises. We turn for the Gospel and face it at the lectern, or in the centre of the church when there is a procession. We turn to face an image of our Lady when we sing the Angelus. We naturally turn to the pulpit or the priest when they are talking to us in the sermon, or merely the notices. Why, then, should we not – and by this I mean all of us: priests and people – turn to listen to and speak to God?

Well, you might say that God is present in everything and so we don't know in which direction to turn. And that's a fair point. You could argue that Christ is present in the people around us and so a circle might be a way of symbolizing that. But what we're still missing is our conversion: our turning. Liturgy is about signs and symbols. It is of the nature of a sacrament: an outward and visible sign of an inward and invisible grace. And so we should consider what signs and symbols are most effective. Which speak of our Christian experience the most?

The physical orientation of the complete self, body and intellect, towards the cross seems to be the best way for us to signify this repentance, this conversion. But it is as much about the reorientation, the turning, of the will as it is about facing the same direction and facing the cross as we, as the pilgrim people of God, travel *together*, not as individuals, towards the Promised Land from our exile. *This* is the strongest symbol of conversion and repentance that sacred liturgy can provide.

With every blessing during Lent

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A Lenten reflection

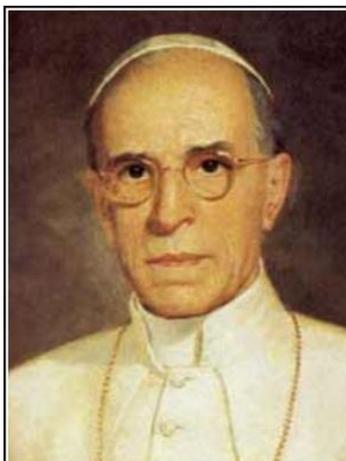
“Self-discipline does not mean self-contempt or destruction of personality, but it rather aims at self-expression in the highest sense of the term. A train is not ‘self-expressive’ when it refuses to follow the roadway laid out for it by an engineer and jumps the track to its own self-destruction. A train is ‘self-expressive’ when it keeps its pressure within determined limits and follows the tracks. A person is not ‘self-expressive’ when he satisfies his lusts like the beasts; he is ‘self-expressive’ when he orders his passions according to reason and the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

A stream that is divided into many channels has little depth. A mind that has no single purpose in living becomes tired and bored. It is this frittering away of life’s energies by many little loves that destroys character. Self-discipline integrates us by deepening the channel of our lives. As Saint Thomas Aquinas says: ‘Man’s heart adheres the more intensely to one thing, the more it is withdrawn from others.’ This gathering of the soul into one focus through self-discipline not only perfects the personality, but it gives a new importance and enjoyment to all other activities of life by arranging them into a pyramid or hierarchy of values, according to their true importance.”

– Archbishop Fulton J Sheen

Is Lent a time for fear?

One of the most unhappy people I ever knew was full of fears of every kind. For him every experience and every encounter was spoiled by worry and suspicion. He was afraid of people and of every kind of situation. So he missed so much of the joy and happiness that other people around him found enriching in their lives. People who were full of good will and good intentions were rebuffed and treated with reservation, and he kept them at arm’s length. He was afraid of any kind of closeness. The trouble might well have originated in his early life experiences, and it’s not easy to navigate something like that. The need there, I’m sure, was for a sense of love, and the security that this love could bring. This is what our faith is all about. In Christ we see God’s love, and we know that it’s a love that doesn’t reject but remains an unchanging attitude of good will. To know that we are loved in this way destroys all fear. Whatever we are, whatever we do, His love remains. It is this sense of His love that can heal our wounds and give a fearful person the feeling of security, “for perfect love casts out fear” as we read in S. John’s first letter. Lent is the perfect time to re-examine our fears.



A day will come when the civilized world will deny its God, when the Church will doubt as Peter doubted. She will be tempted to believe that man has become God. In our churches, Christians will search in vain for the red lamp where God awaits them. Like Mary Magdalene, weeping before the empty tomb, they will ask, ‘Where have they taken Him?’

— Pope Pius XII —

(My “desk picture” shows an Isle of Sheppey scene viewed from my desk, from the garden, or within a few minutes’ walk of it.)