

2nd Sunday Lent (A)

16th March 2014

'Growing in Faith'

Gen 12: the call of Abraham 2Tim1: *He abolished death ... proclaimed life*
... Mt 17: 1–9: the Transfiguration.

Last Sunday I put before you some 'Ideas for Lent 2014' (pink sheets) — ways you might consider entering thoroughly into the spirit of this Lenten season, through our efforts at renewed prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

One of the most important considerations we must each make in this particular Lenten season is our contribution to 'Growing in Faith,' so as I indicated last weekend, I intend to share more specifically with you today just what is the point of 'Growing in Faith,' and what the funds raised are for. It's good that our 'Growing in Faith' season coincides with Lent, since we are already considering at this time just what are our responsibilities to look outwards, to consider our love for God and neighbour, to practice virtue and generosity to others.

I am thankful to the 100+ households who have come to see me 1–1 over the past couple of months, or have had a visit from other parishioners to explain the

campaign. It has been good to spend this time with you, to be able to explain carefully the need for this funding, both at the diocesan level, and on the local, parish level — what it will bring to us at St Augustine's.

The basis for 'Growing in Faith' is to support the diocese at three levels: to fund particular parish projects; to support the priests in training and in their retirement and sickness; and to put the new diocesan *Caritas* on a firm financial footing. These are the three pillars of the programme, as laid out by the Archbishop, and all the 200+ parishes of the diocese are gradually coming on board with the scheme. Our chance to commit to it is now, Jan–April.

1. Support for the priests' welfare is to make sure that the increased numbers of seminarians are able to have their training costs covered by the diocese; and that the increased numbers of clergy entering into retirement in the next two decades are properly cared for. We have over 30 seminarians at the moment, and have had 9 ordinations in the past 12 months. This is good news, but it comes at a cost: £25,000 per seminarian per year; so that's not much

short of a million pounds a year. Likewise, with increased numbers of retiring clergy in the next twenty years, our duty to care for the priests that have served us in parishes, often for up to 50 years of service, is costly but an important action. At the moment the diocese has some 80 retired clergy, but in a decade that is likely to peak at around 120 retired clergy.

2. Our *Caritas* Westminster is a new agency of the diocese which the bishop has put in place to co-ordinate our outreach to the poor and needy within the area of our diocese. *Caritas* Westminster is just two years old, but already works with a number of other partner charities, in order to promote the welfare of the poor and needy. Examples of its work include promoting foodbanks; breakfasts for needy children before school; befriending the lonely elderly; and working to counter the trafficking of women into London and working to rescue them out of unsuspecting slavery in the vice trade. *Caritas* really needs funding to get it off the ground as our diocese's expression of love for our neighbour.

3. But finally, more close to home, the third element of 'Growing in Faith' is the local, parish project. We have done plenty in the past few years to secure the fabric of our church buildings. But, to really promote a "growing in faith," here at St Augustine's, I feel it is now the time to look to fund a part-time catechetical co-ordinator. Not to undermine or undo any of the good things going on, but in order to plug many of the gaps in our parish programme; to reach out to new parishioners, new groups of parishioners, and to help spread the faith in ways that Pope Francis is constantly asking of us: to be imaginative and joyful in evangelizing. I am at the limit of what new I can provide, but by God's grace, with another person, probably young, maybe in their 20s, working here some 15/20 hrs a week, I am sure that we could provide so much more. We could not achieve this at present on parish funding, but with the added funds of 'Growing in Faith,' I am sure we can achieve this, and make new efforts at living the faith more fully through the work of a paid catechist.

The bulk of you who have not had a chance to see

me or another parish visitor 1–1 will be receiving a postal pack through your door in these days. Apologies if you do not receive one, but if that's the case then we will have some spares available next weekend. In the pack will be much more information on the needs and intentions of this fundraising. I ask you, please, to look carefully over the material, and to think about how you might commit to supporting your diocese and your parish in this new way.

Over the next two weeks, I and other parishioners will be making a round of phone calls to those we know who have received the postal pack. In the first instance this is to ask if you have any questions about it, and any concerns. We will do our best to answer your queries. If you feel you are in a position to do so, we invite that you help make a financial contribution to 'Growing in Faith,' and the easiest way to do that is to spread your giving over five years, as I myself am doing: in that way, by giving an affordable amount, the total donated can be a fairly generous one. Our parish goal is £200,000, to be raised over the course of five years; and next week I will be able

to tell you roughly how far we have already got to that amount. Forms with which to record and make your pledge or donation can be sent to you by the parishioner who phones you up, but also there will be pledge forms available next weekend with the Newsletters. I do ask you to pray for the success of our campaign, as in this parish I wholeheartedly believe that a huge difference can be made to the life of our parish by the employing — hopefully this autumn or by the new year — of a catechist.

This Lent let us truly ask the Lord to help us reflect on the ways in which we support His growing Church, for the duty is on us to spread the light of the Gospel. We are the ones who, like the apostles at the Transfiguration, have seen the light; it is our duty to give ourselves to the transmission of that news, that Jesus is the Son of God. Let us do that, by our prayers, our fasting, and our almsgiving in Lent; and may 'Growing in Faith' be supported by every member of this parish to the greatest extent: financially if at all possible, but certainly by goodwill and by prayer.