



Dear parishioners,

1. This coming Sunday, 31st January, is the one traditionally known as ‘Septuagesima’, meaning ‘Seventieth’, because it falls – approximately - seventy days before Easter. The short season of Septuagesima, from now until Ash Wednesday on 17th February, is a sort of ‘wake up call’, a time for us to think about what we will do during Lent and so prepare ourselves for Easter.

This year, with pandemic and lockdown still dominating our lives, we might (understandably) feel we have more than enough penance in our lives without taking on even more. However, Lent is not only (or even primarily) about penance – it is about taking a long, hard look at our lives and making sure that we have our priorities right. The present situation can actually help with this, since it has stripped away much of our self-sufficiency and pride, and revealed our vulnerability and frailty – and reminded us of just how much we need God. Lent fits perfectly into this picture.

So, let us use these two and a half weeks before Ash Wednesday to decide how we, personally, can get the most out of Lent when it arrives. It will obviously be a personal choice for each one of us – but it is good to remember that the Church recommends three practices which should be part of our self-discipline – more prayer, self-denial in some form, and giving to those in need (whether time or money).

And lastly, let us not forget that the word ‘Lent’ means ‘Spring’, and brings with it the promise of Easter, the season of new life.

2. Our churches are permitted by law to open and hold services during the lockdown, but they need to be safe places. **Our very special gratitude goes out to our stewards**, whose work is now more important than ever. If you value our open churches, and the ability to come to Mass, please do consider volunteering as a steward – we need your help.

We have a new ‘Doodle’ where you can sign up to help – please follow this link:

<https://doodle.com/poll/znzccbchagzge2d8>

If you have any difficulty is using the Doodle, or other questions, you can email us at holyghostvolunteers@gmail.com. Thank you!

3. As the challenges of the present time continue, it is good to look out for those who might be finding these conditions especially difficult. If you know of somebody who is elderly or vulnerable, who would like some shopping done or just a telephone call to brighten their day, please do let us know. The easiest way is to drop us an email – balham@rcaos.org.uk. We will use our parish Society of St Vincent de Paul (SVP) to co-ordinate any help needed.

We wish you every blessing for the weekend and new week ahead,

Fr Richard and Fr Giovanni