



✠ **Bosco MacDonald**
Bishop of Clifton

Pastoral Letter for the First Sunday of Lent

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Lent always begins with ashes, the Sign of the Cross, and words that bring us back to a plain truth: “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” We do not hear that to be discouraged, but to be put back on solid ground. We belong to God, and life is short enough to take conversion seriously. The Gospel of St Mark gives Lent its shape in a single sentence: “Repent, and believe in the Gospel” (Mark 1:15). Repentance is meant to show itself. Prayer, fasting, and almsgiving belong together, because love has to show itself in the way we live.

This year Lent comes with a wise companion: Saint Francis of Assisi. Pope Leo XIV has asked the Church to mark a Jubilee Year of Saint Francis from 10 January 2026 to 10 January 2027, as we approach the eight hundredth anniversary of Francis’s death. St Francis has a way of returning us to the Gospel with simplicity and a freer heart. He heard Christ and acted. That is the whole point.

Francis was converted, and he learned what Jesus taught: “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matthew 6:21). Lent is the Church helping us to move our treasure back to where it belongs.

This Jubilee Year of St Francis is for everyone, including those who are sick, elderly, housebound, in hospital, at home, or caring for others day after day. St Paul says, “When I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:10). If you are carrying hidden burdens, you are not on the edge of the Church: your prayer and perseverance are a strength at its centre.

At its heart, the work of the Church is straightforward: worship of God, the handing on of faith, and care for the poor, remembering that poverty takes many forms.

First, prayer. Jesus says, “When you pray... your Father who sees in secret will reward you” (Matthew 6:6). Lent does not ask for complicated methods. It asks for faithfulness: ten minutes with the Gospel each day; Sunday Mass kept sacred; a visit to the Blessed Sacrament when you can; a simple prayer at the end of the day that you keep to, even when tired.

Second, the faith. Our Lord commands us to “make disciples” and to “teach” what he has given (Matthew 28:19–20). During this Lent, open the Scriptures at home, even briefly. Encourage young people to ask questions without embarrassment. Support those who catechise and teach; consider attending the faith formation that is offered in your parish or pastoral area. If faith is left unfed, it falters easily. If it is learned, shared, and prayed, it becomes steady and strong enough for the long road.

Third, the poor. Jesus is unambiguous when he says: “Whatever you did for one of the least of these... you did for me” (Matthew 25:40). St Francis did not look at poverty from a distance; he treated the poor as family. In our own day, poverty shows itself not only in material hardship, but also through loneliness, poor health, mental distress, addiction, grief, unemployment, and the unspoken sense of being left behind. Keep your eyes open: support the charitable work promoted in your parish, and look close to home as well. Some urgent needs are a few doors away and never announced.

After the graces of the Jubilee Year of Hope last year, some of us may feel a little spiritually tired. Another special year, another set of invitations, and life is already full. The Gospel gives a simple answer: “Abide in me... apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:4–5). In the life of faith, the question is rarely more. It is almost always deeper.

So perhaps Lent can be kept simple this year. Ask the Lord for one clear grace, and stay with it. Small steps, taken faithfully, make a real difference.

For some, that will mean coming back to confession after a long time. If that is you, there is no need to be anxious. Begin with the simplest sentence: “Father, it has been a long time.” Everything else can unfold from there.

For some, it will be putting something right with another person: an apology delayed, a conversation avoided, a decision to stop replaying an old hurt.

For some, it will be a bit more simplicity with money and possessions: buying less, wasting less, giving more, and being a little freer.

And for all of us, I hope it will include charity that is specific and real: a visit, a practical kindness, a generous gift, a listening ear, help given quietly where it is needed.

Across our diocese, I am asking parishes and schools to keep three things close this Lent:

- Keep prayer steady, and keep the Gospel at the centre.
- Keep nourishing mind and heart with the faith, so it is understood and loved, and passed on in the way we live.
- Keep the poor close, in every sense, and let our charity be practical and personal.

Saint Francis will help us if we allow him. He will point us back to Jesus again and again, with simplicity and joy. Francis began again, and that is a good place for us to begin.

I ask you to pray for me, as I pray for you. May the Lord bless our diocesan family this Lent, bring us to Easter with hearts made lighter and more peaceful, and may this Year of Saint Francis lead us into deeper faith, stronger hope, and a love that proves itself in concrete deeds.

With the assurance of my prayers for you and your loved ones,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Bosco" with a stylized cross or plus sign to the left.

Rt Rev Bosco MacDonald
Bishop of Clifton

To be read and made available in all churches and chapels on the
First Sunday of Lent, 21st and 22nd February 2026