



Theme: *“Opening our Hearts”*.

Opening Music (Some Suggested Hymns)

- Christ be our Light - Bernadette Farrell
- Hosea - John Michael Talbot
- Taizé Music

Setting: Cloths, candle, nightlights, a bowl with ashes, a picture of a heart, spring flowers

Reflection:

Today is the first day of Lent. Lent is a time to step back, to take stock and re-calibrate our journey. It can be an opportunity to re-acquaint ourselves with God’s plans for us - “plans for peace not disaster”. God promises “a future full of hope” Jer 29:12

Today also happens to be St Valentine’s Day, a day when we celebrate love and relationships. Perhaps it is fitting that the two should coincide. Both remind us to open our hearts, to nurture relationships, to see with compassionate eyes. The invitation is always there. Recently I spent some time reflecting on “The Return of the Prodigal Son” by Henri Nouwen. Its central message is the open-hearted invitation to be at home in God’s love. Deep within our heart space are desires that ultimately lead us to God. “When you

seek me, you shall find me, when you seek me with all of your heart, I will let you find me” Jer 29:13. This Lent, we pray that we may one more step in our journey to open our hearts, to relax into the knowledge

that we are truly loved and, in turn, are called to reach out in love to those in need. Let us take the time and opportunity this lent to spend time with God, to open our hearts to the invitation to make our home in God as God makes a home in us.

Readings: (selection)

I am quite certain of hearing that all goes on happily, and that each of my most dear Sisters will give their whole heart to the good work in which God has engaged them.

Catherine McAuley to Juliana Hardman, 2 October 1841

We have one solid comfort amidst this little tripping about, our hearts can always be in the same place, centred in God, for whom alone we go forward or stay back. Oh, may He look on us with love and pity and then we shall be able to do anything He wishes us to do, no matter how difficult to accomplish or painful to our feelings. Catherine Mc Auley to Mary de Sales White December 20, 1840

I shall give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I shall remove the heart of stone from your bodies and give you a heart of flesh instead. Ezekiel 36:26

Pause for Reflection

Gathering and praying together, we have begun our Lenten journey in community. Opening our hearts to being loved and to love can be quite challenging. *“Let us take one day in hands at a time, merely making a resolve for tomorrow, thus we may hope to get on, taking short, careful steps, not great strides”.* (Catherine Mc Auley to Mary de Sales White, 28th February 1841). Some of these steps may require hope; courage; compassion; gratitude; peace. Let us consider what this might mean for us this Lent.

Hope: We all need hope in our lives. Perhaps you need it for yourself, or perhaps you can give hope to someone in need of it. Will you share the strength God has given you with someone else? (*Pause*)

Courage: Courage is not the same as *not* being afraid. Courage is being afraid but doing it anyway. Where in your life do you need the stepping stone of courage? Can you talk with God now about what is difficult for you and ask God to give you courage this Lent? (*Pause*)

Compassion: Sometimes it is easier to show compassion for others than for ourselves. Can you believe that God loves you, just as you are? How might you show compassion for yourself this Lenten season? (*Pause*)

Gratitude: Perhaps you are grateful for someone or something today. Or maybe you would like to ask God to help you to be grateful. Will you place your hand in God’s and thank God for always being there for you? (*Pause*)

Peace: ‘Peace I give to you; my own peace I give you.’ Hear Jesus say these words to you now. Can you invite Him into those relationships in your life that need His peace? (*Pause*)

Take some time to wonder with God and consider what you need most this Lent. When you have decided what you need to focus on, you are invited to light a candle, and ask God for that grace now and as Lent

continues. *As you feel called, place your candle in the prayer space.*

Intercessions

On this Ash Wednesday, we remember the many invitations God extends to each of us, and so we pray: *Lord, help us to focus on what is life-giving this Lent.*

You invite us to a time of solitude and prayer.

Lord, help us to focus on what is life-giving this Lent.

You invite us into the desert to find You.

Lord, help us to focus on what is life-giving this Lent.

You invite us to worship You in spirit and in truth.

Lord, help us to focus on what is life-giving this Lent.

You invite us into relationship with those on the margins.

Lord, help us to focus on what is life-giving this Lent.

You invite us to accept Your presence and support in our lives.

Lord, help us to focus on what is life-giving this Lent.

Our Father

Together, we pray...

Closing Blessing

Thank you, Lord, for bringing us together to start this journey of Lent. **Amen**

Thank you, Lord, for the blessing of remembering that You are with us every step of the journey. **Amen**

Thank you, Lord, for the blessing of those who will encourage us and walk with us, as You do. **Amen.**