

1st Sunday Lent (B)

- I used to enjoy reading children's stories even as an adult because of the morals & wisdom they conveyed in simple parables.
- There are several about kings or princes & paupers, but one that I remember being relevant in connection with today's gospel is the story of a king who, while walking through the streets of the city, came upon a beggar, who immediately asked him for money.
- The king didn't give him any but invited him to visit him in his palace.
- The beggar took up the king's offer.
- On the appointed day, he made his way to the royal palace, & was ushered into the king's presence, but then he became acutely conscious of his rags he wore & felt ashamed of them because they symbolised the wretchedness of his life.
- The king was a compassionate man who not only invited him for a meal, but also gave him a new suit & tenancy rights to a little cottage in the palace grounds so he could begin a new life.
- But a few days later the beggar moved out of the cottage & was back begging on the streets dressed in his old rags.
- Why did he give up on the possibilities of a new life as well as his new clothes?
- Because he knew that he would have to change - it would mean giving up the life of a beggar – that's all he was prepared to do.
- It wasn't that the new life didn't appeal to him - it did.
- It was just that he knew that a change of life would be slow, painful, tedious & uncertain; but he was too steeped in his old habits to change.
- Though he dreamed of a better life, it was just too frightening for him to change & adapt to living in a new & different way.
- Being involved with many people dealing with various issues in their lives, I have often been left confounded how when possibilities came their way to overcome their problems & people became available to assist their doing so, they reverted back to the old ways of living, even when they acknowledged that their lives could be made so much better by making use of the opportunities offered them.
- But then I found that I wasn't much different myself.
- We can get so used to the way we live with the pain, frustration, anger or resentment that it's more comfortable to remain there than to die to them & move on to a new way of living & relating to others.
- This is so for two reasons, I think – because it requires too much effort on my part to live differently & more freely, but also because we really don't have enough faith, either in ourselves or in others, that our lives can be any better than before.
- Habit plays a big part in our lives.

- It is said that we live the second half of our lives according to the habits acquired during the first half.
- That's quite comforting if they're good habits, but a terrifying prospect for those who have formed bad habits.
- On the other hand, we are more than our habits & we don't need to be ruled by them.
- Lent, & ultimately, Easter, can offer to us the power for change in our own lives & relationships.
- Easter isn't just an event in Christ's life – it is the source of new life for us, born out of dying to old, dark, destructive & deadening ways of living.
- The sight of Jesus fasting & praying in the desert challenges us to look at our own lives, recognise where there needs to be change & transformation & face the temptation of not making an effort, or the temptation of wanting instant solutions, or the temptation of thinking that things won't really be any different because they can't change anyway.
- We can also be tempted to think that efforts I make to further good & necessary changes in our society or the church, or even our parish or families aren't worth it because it just costs us too much & we see little evidence to the efforts we make.
- But often our efforts at renewal & change don't go deep enough.
- Using the analogy of the beggar in the story, if we want a new garment, a new place to live life, we have to cast aside the old one & move to a new place.
- The wearing of a new garment will involve a new way of living.
- If we wish to change the outer aspects of our lives we need to first change the inner attitudes of our minds & in time, we can also effect change in others, but that is the action of the Holy Spirit who can work through us through our faithful perseverance.
- Change requires the substituting of new ways of behaviour for old ones.
- The change of heart, mind & life to which Lent calls us & for which the Easter event empowers us, can be accomplished most of all through the power of prayer, but this requires a humility to admit that we need a power beyond our own capabilities.
- Lent is a great window of opportunity for clarifying our choices for things which impoverish our lives or enriches them.
- What areas in your life need the transformative, healing power of God's love & what must you do to open yourself to that power of change to begin working in your life?
- Where do you need perseverance to overcome the temptation of giving up in areas of social life where you are trying to effect change?