

2026 02 22-Rite of Election-Bishop Alan

Once again welcome to the Rite of Election on this the first Sunday of Lent. The sun is out after, is it 30 days of rain or 60 days of rain? To cheer us up. I need to say a word about the readings but also a word about why we are here and they're slightly different today.

Let me explain. The readings for today are a selection from the mass readings for the first Sunday of Lent. So you might have noticed that we have Genesis, we have Matthew for the first Sunday of Lent and they both have a great deal to say about sin.

Even more to say about the enemy of our human nature. So, for example, in the readings today, Matthew and Genesis, we hear about the devil, about the tempter, about Satan, about the serpent. In other words there's confusion even about what do we say about evil.

How do you understand sin? And that might just chime a bell if like me you enjoy, (is that the right word?), listening to the news. I'm a bit of a news addict and at the moment I have to say excuse my English, it does my head in. It does, it does, it does.

I think my goodness, why don't I get a life and watch something else? But I still watch it, I still listen, whatever. But the reassurance we have today is this and it comes from John's Gospel:

'God so loved the world that he sent his only son'. 'God so loved the world that he sent his only son'. And that actually is our starting point for Lent, for Easter, indeed for the whole of human life as a Catholic Christian. 'God so loved the world he sent his only son'.

And it is a bit of reassurance from a saint because actually Lent is very much about sinners becoming saints. A very English saint you might have heard of is Julian of Norwich. Julian looked at the world she lived in, looked at the passion of Christ, looked at the crucifixion and she said 'love is his meaning'.

'Love is his meaning'. If you can't understand sin, if you can't understand the cross, if you can't understand death, if you can't understand suffering, we at least have the answer: 'Love is his meaning'.

And I say that because we're in the presence today of some remarkable people. We have candidates, we have catechumens. If you don't quite know the difference, look in the booklet on page two or talk to each other.

But these are people who are on the way to sanctity, to becoming saints. In fact, some of these people will be baptised at Easter and then, well my advice is look at them because you're looking at a saint. It's a remarkable thing and in fact it's so remarkable the whole Church wants something of that same journey.

The whole Church wants something of what it's like to move from sin to sanctity, from being a sinner to being a saint. And just a thought about what happens when heaven, who's a witness to all these things, sees sinners becoming saints. In the Gospels there's one simple word that always comes out.

What happens when the lost son is found and goes home? What happens when the lost sheep is found? What happens when the lost coin is found? What happens when the half-dead pilgrim is picked up by the Good Samaritan and taken to the inn, which is the church? There's one beautiful word which is all the way through the Gospels, joy. I tell you there is more joy in heaven

[over one lost sinner] than over 99 good people...well you know the rest. So, in other words, today on the Rite of Election, it's about joy.

People who choose Christ, who choose God for a way forward - and we all of us want to do that at the end of the day. So for those of us who like myself who have been baptised for many, many years or confirmed many years ago and actually find ourselves every Lent reminded that somehow sin catches up on us again despite our best intentions, that somehow we need to become saints again. Well for all of us this season of Lent is a season of great grace, great grace.

We can witness saints being made and we can pray that we ourselves are saints in the making. So once again I thank you the catechumens, I thank you the candidates, I thank you the sponsors, the catechists, the clergy, all of you present today for helping our wonderful people find God, find sanctity, find Easter amidst the tribulations, the difficulties of this life. We go from sin to sanctity, we go from the cross to the resurrection and for that we rejoice. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.