



PASTORAL LETTER FOR THE FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT 2026

Dearest Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Many of us yearn for some kind of healing: healing in our bodies, spirits, minds and hearts; healing in our lives, our relationships, our families, our communities, and in our world.

As we begin Lent, we reflect on our salvation; the deliverance from sin and death which was gained for us by the life, suffering, death and resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. This salvation brings healing to mankind and to all creation. It is a healing which flows from the Divine Mercy of God our Father, who formed our human nature out of 'the dust from the ground' and breathed into us 'the breath of life'.

On this First Sunday of Lent, I would like us all to contemplate the great fruit of our salvation: the free gift of grace given by Jesus Christ, the grace which heals and restores us to the life which had been lost through original sin. This free gift is the gift of Divine Mercy which we will honour liturgically, seven weeks from today, on the Octave Day of Easter, the Feast of the Divine Mercy.

I have been inspired to do so by a survivor of child sexual abuse, following a recent meeting I had with them. The abuse took place many years ago, but for the survivor its effects have overshadowed her life each day since. Each day that is, she said, until she felt the healing touch of Divine Mercy, a gift she received from praying the Divine Mercy devotion.

Lent is that time in the Church's liturgical year when we open up our hearts particularly to God's mercy and seek healing from all that causes suffering in our lives. When God sends His mercy, it is not an abstract, disembodied concept; He sends Himself in person, in His own flesh and blood. Not long ago, at Christmas, we celebrated the mercy of God, incarnate in the flesh of a helpless infant. Now, in Lent, we encounter that child grown to adulthood, Jesus Christ, the new Adam, the one who brings 'life for all' as described by St Paul in his Letter to the Romans.

In the passage today from St Matthew's Gospel, we hear the account of the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness, an event which took place shortly after His baptism and at the beginning of His earthly ministry. It is an account that Jesus Himself must have related to His disciples. Jesus graphically describes how, in that temptation, He experiences the fullness of human vulnerability.

In the desert, angels ministered to Him. Today, He ministers to us, with mercy as tangible as that which is seen throughout His own earthly ministry: through His healing of the sick, His forgiving of sins, and His providing for daily needs. It is this same grace that comes to us still: through His presence in the Sacrament of the Sick, the Sacrament of Penance, and in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. Lent is the time for us to run eagerly to our Lord Jesus Christ and seek the healing that flows from the love and mercy which God our Father offers to us in these sacraments.

In the Sacrament of Penance, God patiently awaits us in the outward expression of our need for His forgiveness and healing, addressing His words of mercy directly to us through the ministry of His priests, who speak in the name and power of His only begotten Son. It is truly a sacrament that might well be called the ‘Sacrament of Divine Mercy.’

The grace of the Sacrament of Penance - won for us by Christ in his passion, death and resurrection - is the concrete expression in space and time of the love with which God looks in forgiveness and mercy upon not only the sins we ourselves confess, but also the sins of the whole world. Please then, take the opportunities offered in this Lenten season to go to confession, find healing in this wonderful sacrament, and experience the new hope it brings.

Looking ahead, I wish to commend to you the Divine Mercy devotion, which was advocated by a humble Polish nun, St Faustina Kowalska, and encouraged by Pope St John Paul II who instituted the Feast of Divine Mercy for the Universal Church in the year 2000.

Praying the Divine Mercy devotion can be transformative for the lives of those who, like the survivor of abuse I recently met, have carried deep wounds from past experiences of suffering, whether emotional, physical, or spiritual. By meditating on the mercy of Jesus, individuals find the strength to move beyond their suffering, knowing that God offers a place of refuge and healing.

Let us embrace our Lenten journey, then, with confidence and trust in Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Through prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, let us surrender our lives to His love and heed His promise of mercy, so that when Easter comes, we may rejoice in the gift of new life which His resurrection brings.

✠ Marcus
Bishop of Leeds
Apostolic Administrator of Middlesbrough

Given at Leeds on 8th February 2026 and appointed to be read and in the churches and chapels of the Dioceses of Leeds and Middlesbrough at all Sunday Masses on 21st and 22nd February 2026, the First Sunday of Lent.

Where possible please make copies of this Pastoral Letter available after Mass and on parish websites following the First Sunday of Lent.

Information about the Divine Mercy Devotion can be found at the following website:
<https://divinemercuryapostolate.co.uk/>