



DIOCESE OF SALFORD

*Pastoral Letter of
The Right Reverend Terence J Brain
Bishop of Salford*

Dear Family of God in Salford Diocese,

The forty days of Lent are with us again and the Church, like a good parent, tells her children the purpose of Lent through story form in the Scriptures. "My father was a wandering Aramaean"...(Deut 26:6) who went to Egypt, grew into a great nation, was persecuted; prayed to God and was led to freedom - through a great journey of 40 years - into the Promised Land. Because this happened, we now offer the first fruits each year to the Lord God, because it is right and fitting.

Jesus grew up in this tradition and would have listened to the account of how God was with His people. So when Jesus began his public teaching he placed it in the same context. (Lk 4:1ff) He was "baptised" with the Father's Love, and went on his own great journey for 40 days to prepare himself to proclaim the Promised Land and to offer Himself as the first fruits for all of us.

Now it's our turn, once again in Lent, to recall the account of God's providence in our lives and especially in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The purpose of teaching with stories is to enable the hearer to develop and learn: to make their own the truth they have learnt. Not everyone who heard the account of the wandering Aramaean was happy! The hard slog of 40 years was resisted. They cried out against everything they could think of. Lack of food and drink: creature comforts; Envy and jealousies broke out among them. Golden calves instead of faithful trust in God's promise to be with them day and night.

Jesus too, faces all these temptations as he prepares to proclaim the Good News of salvation and comes through them all; truly faithful to the love of the Father.

Now it's our turn, once again, to choose either to resist the invitation of Lent or to open ourselves up to the invitation: to reach out for the love of God. "If your lips confess that Jesus is the Lord and if you believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, then you will be saved." (Rom 10:9)

The wonder of a child is that it is totally dependant on its parents for its human life and development: without them it will not reach its full potential. We, God's children, are totally dependant on the love of God to reach the Promised Land and fulfill the potential He has promised us of eternal life in Him. Without Him we are nothing.

The big temptation of the present age is to believe that our potential is in our own hands: that we don't need God to do anything in our lives – not even to explain our beginning or end. We might tell our story thus: 'I'm a wandering Aramaean not because of the call of God, but because I like to chill out, find myself and by sheer determination and character make good. I don't need anyone. I do it myself. Cheers mate!'

Now it's your turn: Lent is the time to revise the story: Can you tell us how God is in your life? Can you teach us how to trust God, as Christ did? How will you tell the story?

+ Terence J. Brain
Bishop of Salford

Given at Wardley Hall and appointed to be read in all churches and chapels of the diocese
on the weekend of 25th February, the First Sunday of Lent.