

**THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT – 7 MARCH 2021**  
**ST CHAD'S CATHEDRAL**

*God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.*

On the Third Sunday of Lent last year we were already preparing for the first lockdown. I was celebrating Mass in Coventry for the university students and none of us knew what the coming year would bring. Looking back, we can review all that we have experienced and appreciate what we have learnt.

Has the last year, facing the many challenges of the coronavirus pandemic, made us wiser or stronger? In many ways I think it has. At times it has forced us to acknowledge our utter dependence on God for life, health and well-being and our dependence on one another – especially through our recognition of the doctors and nurses who have cared for us, the scientists who have developed the vaccines in record time, the teachers who have kept our schools open throughout the year and the many key-workers who have kept us supplied with all that we need.

This Lent, more than ever, we are conscious of the efforts and the struggle of our political leaders to make wise decisions – about interpreting the data they receive, about the scope of the restrictions imposed and the pace of lifting them as we emerge from lockdown, and about the economy of our countries. We have also seen the strength and resilience of those who have faced illness or bereavement and those who have supported them.

Yet during Lent, the Church asks us to face up to the foolishness and weakness that we also find within ourselves as the result of our fallen human nature – and to bring what we find to the Lord, especially in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. We are never to feel overwhelmed or to be defeated by our failings because they have already been overcome by the cross of Christ. In him we find our wisdom and our strength.

St Paul reminded the Christians at Corinth that *God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength*. Whatever impresses us about human achievements – the wise sayings or the strong deeds which we rightly admire – offers us a glimpse of the immensity of God's wisdom and strength.

Today's Gospel passage is a dramatic and powerful reminder that our Lord is ready to upset and overturn our settled ways of doing things. He challenged the money-changers and the pigeon-sellers. What he said and did disturbed them and disrupted their daily business, making money out of people's piety and devotion, *turning my Father's house into a market*.

The experience of the last year has turned all our lives upside down and made us stop and reconsider our priorities and values. But the disturbance to our way of life cannot be compared with the experience of the Christian communities in Iraq whom the Holy Father is visiting this weekend. They have faced persecution, the destruction of their homes, communities and livelihood and the threat of death.

Now they are being comforted and encouraged by Pope Francis, who has risked his own safety and well-being to be with them. Some commentators have criticised the Pope for this decision - others have said it is not wise to gather so many people together during the pandemic. The Holy Father is seeking wisdom and strength from the Lord to fulfil his mission faithfully.

As the Christians of Mosul meet with Pope Francis in Church Square, surrounded by the ruins of their places of worship they will surely hear a powerful echo of our Lord's words in today's Gospel: *Destroy this sanctuary and in three days I will raise it up*. We pray that their faith may be strengthened and that wisdom of heart will sustain them.

And as we continue our pilgrimage through Lent, we can also ask this weekend for the wisdom to know God's will for us, for the strength to accomplish it in the days ahead and for insight and perseverance in our prayer, our fasting and our charitable giving.