

## Lent is coming

The Church's season of penitence begins on Ash Wednesday, 28<sup>th</sup> February. The spring retreat will be a chance to prepare for the gifts this time offers us, and to think about what the Church is proposing to us in these days.

"Lent" means "spring", and this alerts us to the fact that over the next month we shall move out of wintry conditions and into a time of rebirth. Lent is the great time for returning to life, spiritually, but in every other way as well. Living our lives deeply and thoughtfully, we can welcome this process and assist it.

### Three disciplines

The Church sets before us three keys which are all required to open the mystery of Lent:

- ***Fasting*** which sets aside comfort, leaves greed unsatisfied, and puts us in touch with a deeper reality: *desire*.
- ***Prayer*** which leads us to call on God's love, and teaches us to live in his presence, never alone.
- ***Deeds of Generosity*** which turn us from possessions and self-concern, helping us to live for others, and to share our journey with them.

The Character Of Lent

The Lenten season, celebrated in the spirit of the Church, is sober and serious, but it is also deeply joyous and generous, because it is offering us a new life that is infinite and eternal. It has times of quiet where we must be alone with Christ, who fasted and prayed in the wilderness; it has times of closeness, where the whole community shares and celebrates the journey to Easter. It renews and restores our relationships – with Father, Son, and Spirit, with families and friends, with the people we have the grace of helping, with the Church. It takes courage to accept the three Lenten disciplines: but it offers us the promise of great gifts.

*University of Nottingham Catholic Chaplaincy*

# SPRING Retreat

At alton castle  
Staffordshire  
16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> February  
2001

## Prayer

Prayer is a pure, concentrated form of love which we can practice at any time. It goes to the heart of truth.

We want on this retreat to discuss our need for a deep, fruitful life of prayer. It is possible to talk about it without doing it: so we need to think *practically* about what we must do in order to experience prayer.

Christian prayer is special, unlike any other. Having this prayer at the heart of our lives is what makes us Christian. To be in Christ brings us to the Father; together they pour out the Spirit into our lives, and we are made sharers in the divine life.

Conversion

Prayer is the practice of the presence of God. Living in the world we are constantly prone to lose our awareness of God's presence. We need to *turn* towards God constantly. This is a facet of the mystery called *conversion* or *repentance*.

It is not a once-for-all threshold, but a constant necessity for each new moment. We must renew our seeking for God in every situation, every relationship, every encounter with reality. The Greek bible speaks of changing the mind (*metanoia*). As people who are trying to care for our minds, we have a special call to conversion.

Mind And Heart

Heart (*kardia*) is the Biblical term for the seat of personality, the core of our being, our true, innermost self. The heart is what God looks into, and it is in the heart that we encounter him.

Prayer is a taking-possession of the heart, and conversion turns over the heart to God, who comes to make his home in it. This is what frees us to change, to grow, and to enter into life.

Mental activity is only one of the many powers we enjoy. Holiness demands the unifying of all our powers as we welcome God into our heart.

### Testing Our Motives

Every retreat should include the testing of the motives that inspire our actions. We have to be sure that our ideals

really engage our life, that the working decisions we make every day will stand up before God as we meet him in our hearts.

Sometimes we may become aware that there are elements in our personal “economy”, the way we keep account of ourselves, which will not survive this encounter with God. Lent is a time for Christ to be our shepherd, re-uniting us, leading our scattered self to integrity, knitting up into one our disordered lives.