

Homily 1st Sunday in Lent 2026

‘Lent is a holy season of prayer, fasting and reaching out to the most vulnerable.’

I realised my human fragility and weakness never so much as on a remote hillside in Rwanda. I was trekking with the Parish Priest from the town of Mabuga to a hilltop village to celebrate Mass. After some miles walking along the river and through the ‘bush’ we began the long ascent. Despite being well equipped with water, correct clothing and footwear I felt, at a point in the climb, totally drained, exhausted by the heat and humidity. I fell to the ground unable to take another step. I told the others to go on without me. About half an hour later an old woman, endangering her own safety, appeared and began to cool my face and shoulders with a wet towel. She said not a word. The woman then disappeared as suddenly as she had appeared. ‘Veronica’ as I came to call her, made me realise how fragile life can be and how dependent we are on others for our survival.

Our fragility as human beings is underlined by today’s reading from Genesis. Made from the clay of the earth we are also weak sinners who fail in our relationships with God and with our sisters and brothers in Christ. Pride, as in the case of Adam and Eve, is usually our undoing. We, like our ‘first parents, eat of the ‘forbidden fruit’ when we fail to live as the ‘sons and daughters’, God created us to be. Like them we can all fall into the trap of wanting to be greater than Our Creator.

The Responsorial Psalm proclaims the attitude we must have, before God, when we fall. We must humbly acknowledge our sinfulness, seek God’s mercy and meekly ask His forgiveness. The Psalmist prays, ‘Have mercy on me, O God, according to your merciful love; according to your great compassion, blot out my transgressions. Wash me completely from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. Have mercy on us, O Lord, for we have sinned.

St Paul in his Letter to The Romans tells us that just as sin entered the world by one man so also was our redemption secured by one man, Jesus Christ, Son of God and Saviour of the world. Jesus, by his Passion, Death and Resurrection ensured our freedom from sin and death. Adam’s sin is forgiven in the salvific actions of Christ,

That same Jesus never sinned. Though tempted like each and every one of us, he rejected and eventually destroyed the power of evil. In the Temptation Stories in today’s Gospel from St Matthew, Jesus refuses the lure of unbridled pleasure, earthly power and superficial and fleeting popularity. His way, God’s way, is instead the Way of the Cross. St Paul in his Letter to The Philippians states that Jesus, whilst we were still sinners humbled himself and died for us, death on a Cross. Without the intervention of God in Christ, we would still be in the darkness of sin without hope and without light to show the way.

‘Veronica’ on that remote Rwandan hillside made me appreciate how the actions of one person can be lifesaving. She also reinforced, by her selfless love risking her own life, the great price Christ paid to save us. ‘Veronica’s’ actions also demonstrated how God’s Holy Spirit is still present in lives today. That same Holy Spirit urges us to ‘go out’ and ‘preach’ The Gospel by our loving actions especially in aid of the weakest, most fragile and the neediest.

How stunningly beautiful is that!