

# Pastoral Letter for The First Sunday of Lent 2016

by [admin](#) | Feb 13, 2016 | [Pastoral letters](#) |

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

How many times have I heard myself saying something like, *“If only I had listened properly in the first place, I wouldn’t find myself in such a mess?”* I could be halfway through what at first seemed to be a very straight forward operation, for example trying to find someone’s house and I thought I had memorised the address, only to realise that the address I had memorised wasn’t the correct one! Or, as I am driving along I feel the car wobble and shudder and, as the tyre-pressure light comes on, I realise that I have a puncture. Earlier that week a good friend had warned me that my back tyre was looking a little flat and certainly well-worn, *‘So you’d better give it a check.’* *“If only I had listened properly in the first place, I wouldn’t find myself in such a mess.”* Would that the only difficult situations I have found myself in during life were as simple to solve as these. There are other much more complicated scenarios, physical, emotional and moral scenarios that have caused me to say, *“If only I had listened properly in the first place, I wouldn’t find myself in such a mess.”*

So there is no doubt that I need to listen more carefully and attentively. I need to open my mind, my heart, my soul so that I genuinely hear and take in what is being said to me. But it can’t stop there; having heard and understood, I need to act on the knowledge that has been given to me, otherwise I will still find myself in the same mess. I need to listen, to understand and to put into action, and then perhaps I won’t find myself so frustrated and, at times, self-humiliated!

We are just beginning the season of Lent. Preface II of Lent says: *“For you have given your children a sacred time for the renewing and purifying of their hearts that, freed from disordered affections, they may so deal with the things of this passing world as to hold rather to the things that eternally endure.”* So how are you going to put all that into practice? Some of us make New Year’s Resolutions, but not many keep them for long? For us Christians this is the time of resolve and decision. This is a sacred time, not to be missed and certainly in this Extraordinary Holy Year of Mercy, it is a once-in-a life-time opportunity.

Let me share with you what I think I have to do, and if you think it is worthwhile I invite you to do the same. Having recognised that so often I get myself into to such a mess I have to learn to listen. I need to open my mind, my heart, my soul so that I genuinely hear and take in what is being said to me; what is being said to me by the Word of God during this blessed time of Lent. If I am to receive mercy, I need to listen to Him who is Mercy Incarnate. And I need mercy because it *“expresses God’s way of reaching out to the sinner, offering a new chance to look at himself, convert and believe.”* (Misericordiae Vultus #21)

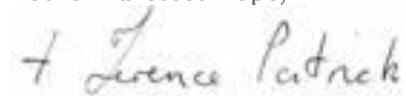
Hopefully during the course of Lent the Word of God will teach me, lead me, comfort me and convict me, strengthen me and convert me. The Word of God will teach me the true meaning of

sin and mercy. The Word of God will lead me in the ways of mercy, truth and justice. The Word of God will comfort me with tender loving mercy, but he will also convict me for my lack of mercy, truth and justice. The Word of God will strengthen me by his compassionate supporting love and the Word of God will melt my hard heart with his deep and constant glance of mercy. And having listened, what will I do then? Well, I can do no better than to contemplate and put into practice the Works of Mercy. For *“in the Corporal Works of Mercy we touch the flesh of Christ in our brothers and sisters who need to be fed, clothed, sheltered and visited. In the Spiritual Works of Mercy – counsel, instruction, forgiveness, admonishment and prayer – we touch more directly our own sinfulness. But we sinners can receive the gift of realising that we too are poor and in need. Even ‘the proud’, ‘the powerful’ and ‘the wealthy’ can also be embraced and undeservedly loved by the crucified Lord.”* (Holy Father’s Message for Lent 2016) So I can listen to and act on the Merciful Word of God who wants to speak to my heart this Lent. And having received the mercy of God I need to become merciful myself and a herald of mercy to others, putting into practice, as best I can, the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy. Will you join me?

Have a blessed, fruitful and mercy-filled Lent.

Prompt our actions with your inspiration, we pray, O Lord,  
and further them with your constant help,  
that all we do may always begin from you  
and by you be brought to completion.  
Grant, almighty God,  
through the yearly observances of holy Lent,  
that we may grow in understanding  
of the riches hidden in Christ  
and by worthy conduct pursue their effects.  
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Yours in blessed hope,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "+ Lennox Patrick". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Bishop of Middlesbrough