

10.3.69  
6.3.72 ✓  
8.3.73 ✓

B 138 <sup>Days</sup>  
(RHK-TAPE)  
(B 90)  
(R48)

LENT PREFACE

(ANGELUS)

It takes time and effort really to get to know someone well. Even if there is 'love at first sight'. The effort may not be noticeable, because what matters and what's essential is interest in another, the willingness to know and be known. But time changes all of us; if interest remains alive, time will allow a closer intimacy, growing all the time. Love changes us too, when there really is a personal meeting. People can, and do, say that their lives were changed when they met so-and-so; how often do people attribute a sudden change in a friend's behaviour to the fact that "he, or she, must be in love." But falling in love is only the beginning of a relationship that can go on developing, becoming deeper and more unifying as long as life lasts — or that can blossom for a while and then fizzle out, for one reason or another. What reasons? Fundamentally, perhaps it's that too soon we start taking people for granted. But you can't take another person for granted without treating that person as just another object, another piece of furniture in one's life — a person is never that, and to treat one so is to slow up one's own immaturity as a human being. But how many of us tend to take God for granted, to forget that He is more personal than any human friend or acquaintance, to forget that it takes time and effort and it is to come to know God, and even then we can't know Him fully as He is — even less so than we can know another human person. Love of God begins mysteriously as does every love; it can blossom briefly & then wither

away as do many human loves — except that in this case we have the assurance that the loss of interest or effort is not on God's side but only on ours. So we must look to ourselves, if there appears to have been a cooling down of our relationship with God, or <sup>signs of</sup> a return to an ungodly way of living. And this is one of the purposes of Lent, this 6-week period for spiritual retreat and stock-taking, a time for prayer and penance. In this spirit of renewal and fresh effort, then, let us pray today with gratitude to God for all the gifts of His grace and kindness, with sorrow for our past ingratitude and infidelities, and with heightened awareness of the practical demands that Love of God makes in our lives, in our ways of acting and of looking at the world around us — people, events, problems.

PRAYERS — For a prayer in music today, here's <sup>one of 4 notes for</sup> part of Palestine's a season of penance, by Francis Poole, Timor et tremor.

setting of the seasonal - Lent-time hymn in honour of Our Lady, from the daily Office: Ave Regina — hail, queen of the heavens. MUSIC

ERA(0)7  
Ave Regina  
- Palestine  
(AS 275)

I wonder <sup>was a bit more prominent &</sup> did you feel, as I did, that Ash Wednesday this year (slipped by rather noticeably than usual? For the first time in a number of years here in HK, Ash Wed. yesterday intrusively and without much impact? Maybe it was because of transferring stood on its own, without being enveloped in the atmosphere & holiday spirit of the Chinese New Year it to last week, after the festivities of the lunar new year; but maybe, — it was even a day of fast & abstinence. But if you didn't notice it much, perhaps one reason is also, because its ceremonies have worn rather thin and their meaning <sup>that its ceremony and meaning have become dulled by repetition.</sup> become dulled by routine repetition.) In fact, the original significance of Ash Wednesday as the beginning of the season of penance, has been largely lost in practice. Perhaps to recall something of it may give you a clearer



understanding of the purpose of Lent and the meaning of repentance for a Christian who has gone back on his Baptism commitment of himself to Christ in love. Nowadays we tend to think of Lent as <sup>perhaps</sup> the time for making a good confession before Easter — but, in the early and original observance of Lent, one made one's confession before Lent began, and the whole season was the time of penance, emphasized and made vivid by the Church's liturgy and ceremony. On Ash Wednesday, in token of what sin really means in the relationship with God and with the community of God's people, those who had confessed and were seeking reconciliation with God and the Church, were led outside the church building by the bishop, with that verse from the book of Genesis we still use on Ash Wed. "remember, man, that you are dust, and will return to dust" — but its significance then was in recalling the full incident from the Bible, the point being that this was the sentence of exile and death which followed the sin and disobedience of Eden. Expulsion from the garden, from the friendship of God is what sin means — the weeks of Lent gave time for reflection <sup>on</sup> this, helped by the action of the liturgy which kept penitents at the Church door, away from the rest of the community and, especially, away from the Eucharist the symbol of unity among the faithful and between them and God in Christ. The solemn reconciliation of those who'd been doing penance then took place on Holy Thursday, when the bishop brought them back into the community and to the altar. This is what the penance of Lent really implies & leads up to.