

Nelrascan's (Byrd)  
(Lament. Jerem. 2<sup>2</sup>)

## LENT PREFACE

A prayer for the time of Lent, which began yesterday, ... with Ash Wednesday, and the Budget. That, at least, wasn't in any way penitential: in fact, in its measures to show concern for some of the taxpayer's family obligations, you might say it fits in well with one of the purposes of the penitential aspect of Lent, to make us more aware of our obligations to others and act accordingly. For, giving alms (as well as prayer and fasting) is one of the oldest traditions of the Lenten season. And you don't have to be wealthy to give alms. These days, when in most countries and in HK too, the state or the government takes care of basic necessities and life needs (however well or badly they may do it, either directly or through voluntary bodies of one kind and another), many people perhaps forget about giving alms. We pay taxes to the government, to cover the costs of medical + social and educational provisions for the community at large. We maybe give a regular sum each month or year to some particular charity or agency: we may help raise money for the Community Chest, or some such organisation. But are there, can there be the limit or the extent of our responsibility for others, our obligation to alms-giving? It's certainly easier, more efficient, less troublesome and more impersonal to give in taxes and donations — or so at least it seems. But just because it's impersonal and (in the case of taxes) you haven't much choice about it, is it really the same as alms-giving? Mother Teresa of Calcutta has remarked that even if the state did really take care of all the social, nutritional and other needs of the people that she and her sisters minister to,

there would still be a job for her to do, in showing and giving care, love and concern to people in and for themselves, the inter-person connection. That's what's absent in tax-paying and (most) donation-giving. Yet we need the connection, as much as (in another sense) the beneficiaries of our taxes and donations need our giving. For alms-giving isn't just a social or economic exercise, but for us a religious act above all — and that means connections — with God, with our neighbour. To make/show yourself as neighbour, in giving and receiving. So, Pope John Paul has chosen as the theme of his message for Lent this year the gospel question, 'Who is my neighbour?' This is what he says about it: "You will remember, it was with the parable of the Good Samaritan that Jesus answered this question posed by a lawyer who had just acknowledged what he read in the Law: 'you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind: and your neighbour as yourself.' The Good Samaritan is, in the first place, Christ himself: He is the one who approached us first and made us His neighbour, so as to help us, to heal us and to save us: He emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. If there is still some distance between God and ourselves, that can only be due to us, and to the obstacles we place in the way of His coming close: the sin which is in our heart, the injustice that we commit, the hatred and divisions that we foster, everything that still prevents us from loving God with all our heart and all our strength. The time of Lent is the special time for purification



and penance, so as to allow our Saviour to make us his neighbour and save us by his love. | From Pope John Paul: a break now, to listen to this song for the season: *Salvator Mundi* by Thomas Tallis

MUSIC

### PRAYERS

The liturgical period of Lent (says the Pope in his Lenten message) is given us in and through the Church in order to purify us of that remainder of selfishness and excessive attachment to things (material or otherwise) which keep us apart from those who have a right to our help: principally those who, whether physically near or far, are unable to live their lives with dignity, as men and women created by God in his image and likeness. Allow yourselves, then, to be informed by the spirit of penance and conversion, which is the spirit of ~~love~~<sup>love</sup> and sharing. Imitating Christ, draw close to those who have been left naked and wounded, those whom the world ignores or rejects. Take part in all that is being done in your local Church to help Christians and all people of good will to obtain for each one of their brothers and sisters the means of living with dignity, and of taking upon themselves their own human and spiritual advancement and that of their families. May the Lenten collection... allow you through sharing, to help the local churches of less favoured countries to fulfill their mission as Good Samaritans towards those for whom they are immediately responsible: their own poor, the undernourished, those who are denied justice, those who are still unable to ensure their own development and that of their communities. ... And if we still ask the question 'Who is my neighbour', we shall read the answer on the face of the Risen One and hear from his lips: "as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me".