

SHROVE TUESDAY MASS
WITH BALLARAT CATHOLIC SECONDARY COLLEGE
STUDENT LEADERS ON MARCH 1, 2022
AT ST PATRICK'S CATHEDRAL, BALLARAT

Homily

People go to great lengths to get in shape physically. They go on strict diets. They walk and jog and swim and lift weights and stretch themselves with aerobics. They do all this to tone up the body. Tomorrow we start a program to get us in shape spiritually. We call the program Lent – a time of training to tone up the spirit.

The gospel gives us a three-point training plan: prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Prayer means focussing on God. Fasting reminds us that we don't live on bread alone. Almsgiving is one way of showing practical charity to people in need.

Unless we're careful, it's easy to become self-centred. The time of Lent is meant to help us become more self-giving. It's easy to be self-serving in what we do. Lent is meant to help us be ready to serve others. As we heard in the gospel a few moments ago, Jesus said that if anyone wants to be great, they must learn to serve. The spiritual training program of Lent is meant to help us become really great people by becoming more like Christ who came to serve. This is particularly important for you as leaders in your school communities. You will be leaders in the spirit of Christ in so far as you become servants, focussed on helping others.

We might draw a lesson from the role of the Pope as a leader in the Christian community. Over the centuries, the Pope has acquired various titles. One of his titles is "Bishop of Rome" because he has a special responsibility to care for the Christian community in Rome. Another title is "Supreme Pontiff of the Universal Church". He has a wide responsibility to care for the Church throughout the world. But this morning I would like to underline another title. The Pope is also called "Servant of the servants of God". This has been a title given to the Popes for around 1500 years. It highlights the fact that the Pope is called to be a servant of the Christian community. Since each member of the community is called to be a servant of God, the Pope is called to be the servant of the servants of God.

As the Pope has a mission to be a leader in the Christian community, you have a mission to be leaders in your school communities. As the Pope is meant to be a servant leader, so are you. This is leadership in the spirit of Christ, who came to serve. May we be leaders like this. May we lead by putting ourselves at the service of those we meet day by day.

Bishop Paul Bird CSsR