



## Statement by Bishop Brendan Leahy

### ***Lent 2021: A Time to Dream, Discern and Donate***

It's obvious. We are heading into Lent this year quite drained, disorientated and distracted by the relentless twists and turns of COVID. The first lockdown came in the middle of Lent last year and here we are in lockdown again. We could hardly have imagined anything ever like COVID hitting our world today, levelling us in our tracks let alone being here with it a full year later.

But I invite Catholics in the Diocese not to let Lent drift past us, despite all the distractions and the despair that some of us feel. Yes, we need to work a little more than usual at making Lent work for us this year but if we do, the return will be greater. It is really worth it because the world needs people to take time out to focus on what we have learned from COVID, appreciate the essentials of life, not least love, and find ways to give that to others who really need it.

In many parishes on Ash Wednesday small packs with ashes and a prayer card in them will be available in churches. The ashes can be distributed in the family by a family member. The Trocaire boxes will also be available. But I want to propose three d's for Lent this year: dream, discern and donate. We've got so used to 2-d images, it's good to have a 3-d focus.

**Dream.** Over 2 million people have already lost their lives to the coronavirus. In Ireland nearly 4,000 have died with over 200,000 getting the disease. Our social, economic, work and family patterns have been battered. There have been such dreadful downsides though there have been some upsides too. But we really are now entitled to start dreaming about the world beyond COVID. We need to look and name the reality for what it is, but at the same time dream about how we want our future. What have we learned from this COVID pandemic? What lessons do we want to bring forward out of it?

And not just for our island. There have been devastating effects on people especially in the poorest countries of the world. Global economics needs an overhauling. We need to think and talk about these things and dream of a new humanity, a more united world, a more fraternal community rooted in solidarity. I suggest we spend time over this Lent "dreaming". What I mean is taking time out each day for a session of thinking, meditating and praying; about a fairer world and what we can do in our

own small corner to effect that. Perhaps sit in silence with a candle lit. Let the facts and faces of all that has impacted on us because of COVID reach us in a prayerful spirit. It can also be a time to go on line to follow the celebration of the Mass during the days of Lent.

**Discern.** The first step in the world changing begins in my heart. Each of us has to discern; that is work out what's the right thing to do moving forward. I believe COVID has been a time when we've heard many whispers in our heart suggesting how we might live our life in a way that's different – whether it be with regard to our family life, our work-balance life, our care of creation and our recognition of how interconnected we all are. Let Lent be a decision-making time for us. Can I make a suggestion? Why not read a wonderful book by Pope Francis *'Let us dream, the Path to a Better Future'*. It's edited by a journalist, Austin Ivereigh, and is available in paperback or on kindle. In this book, the Pope guides us like a spiritual director, helping us discern the right direction to take in life. And Lent is all about re-setting the compass of our lives.

**Donate.** Traditionally Lent has been associated with almsgiving. It's a time to notice those around us who are less well off. It's a time to donate, to give, to be generous. But don't think immediately of money. There are so many ways we can donate more. We can give our time, our patience, our smile, our advice, our friendship, our consolation, our practical help, our wisdom, our competencies.

Financial donations also matter, especially to the many charities who reach where we cannot go. Here at home but also around the world. Just think: over 270 million people are facing crisis levels of food supplies, twice last year's number because of the virus. The virus is ripping through refugee centres. I recommend donating to Trócaire. Last year it brought relief and hope to 2.5 million people around the world. Trócaire is present in so many countries, including Myanmar, South Sudan and Ethiopia. It has a wonderful website worth consulting. Trócaire, for instance, is the only healthcare provider in a region of Somalia the size of Ireland. It is doing wonderful work in partnership with local development and humanitarian actors, to support people and communities to tackle the root causes of poverty.

Recently, Antonio Guterres, UN Secretary-General, commented: "There is a natural tendency in the face of crisis to take care of one's own first. But true leadership understands that there are times to think big and more generously."