

which underpins our continuing existence. The truth is that living in this way is not sustainable. Our penance – our engagement with reality – is to live within the bounds of what is sustainable, maybe considering the use of non-polluting transport, or getting involved in the work of an environmental group, or even exploring a vegetarian or vegan lifestyle. These are all healthy limitations which turn us around, make us repent, align us closer with the truth of our created humanity.



TAKING UP THE CROSS

In today's Gospel Jesus says that those who wish to follow him must take up their cross. At its most fundamental, that cross is the challenge, the vicissitudes and privations of just being human. Jesus invites us to fully embrace the truth of who we are.

St Cuthbert, the hermit patron of my hermitage, clearly didn't get the memo! He was quite keen on extreme asceticism. There is a story from St Bede about St Cuthbert: "he would go forth, down to the sea, until the water reached his neck and arms, and spend the night in praising God". Fortunately – as can be seen if you look closely at the bottom right of the picture – sea otters arrived to comfort and to warm his feet when he finally emerged. I pray we all have our own version of sea otters to comfort and encourage us as we turn to face our own truths.

For more information on the Season of Creation: <https://seasonofcreation.org>

Mass text

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

Give peace, O Lord, to those who wait for you,
that your prophets be found true.
Hear the prayers of your servant,
and of your people Israel.

FIRST READING Isaiah 50:5-9

PSALM Psalm 114

RESPONSE

I will walk in the presence of the Lord,
in the land of the living.

Or Alleluia!

1. I love the Lord for he has heard
the cry of my appeal;
for he turned his ear to me
in the day when I called him. R.
2. They surrounded me, the snares of death,
with the anguish of the tomb;
they caught me, sorrow and distress.
I called on the Lord's name.
O Lord my God, deliver me! R.
3. How gracious is the Lord, and just;
our God has compassion.
The Lord protects the simple hearts;
I was helpless so he saved me. R.

4. He has kept my soul from death,
my eyes from tears
and my feet from stumbling.
I will walk in the presence of the Lord
in the land of the living. R.

SECOND READING James 2:14-18

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia, alleluia!
The only thing I can boast about is the
cross of our Lord,
through whom the world is crucified to me,
and I to the world.
Alleluia!

GOSPEL Mark 8:27-35

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

How precious is your mercy, O God!
The children of men seek shelter in the
shadow of your wings.

Next Sunday's Readings:
Wisdom 2:12, 17-20
James 3:16 – 4:3
Mark 9:30-37

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PENANCE

The life of a diocesan hermit is governed by Canon 603. Among other things, this states that life in the hermitage is to be a life of "constant prayer and penance". Constant prayer is probably a familiar, if challenging, concept for most people, but constant penance? A dictionary definition of penance is "self-inflicted punishment". Constant self-punishment sounds frankly terrifying – and neither healthy nor sensible in the context of a lifelong commitment.

So how to live out "constant penance" safely and with integrity? The life of the hermitage is a simple life – much of the flummery and dissemblance of social living is withdrawn, so that what is most fundamental and foundational to our being human can emerge. When we shed some of those artifices, it can be a very joyful and freeing experience, but it can also be challenging and uncomfortable. The willingness to engage with that experience of reality is penance lived constantly.



The original Greek which is translated as "repentance" (from the Latin for which "penance" is derived) is *metanoia*, which means "turning around". Penance is the intentional act of turning around – not glancing back fearfully over the shoulder, but turning to face the headwind of truth with courage. Penance is to try to live without a barrier between ourselves and the truth.

I think the natural world sets an excellent example of this sort of penance. The penance in nature is necessarily constant and assiduous – a tree has no contrived defence against the elements but must bend as the wind blows, flourish with the sun and strain its roots deep for the source of water, responding to drought, sunlight, coldness and heat as they present themselves. A tree grows in its place, in the conditions in which it finds itself. It abides in the stark reality of its circumstance. So how might this penance, this "engaging with reality", manifest itself in this Season of Creation? How might it change our behaviour towards our world?

There is an increasing awareness that some of the perks of modern living are delusional: the excessive fuel we burn, the unnecessary food we waste, the unbiodegradable plastics we pollute with; all of these are distortions of the ecological balance

Season of Creation



During September the Church celebrates the Season of Creation, "a time to renew our relationship with our Creator and all creation through celebration, conversion, and commitment together". Rachel Denton is a diocesan hermit and has written these pieces from her urban hermitage which is dedicated to St Cuthbert.

12 SEPTEMBER 2021

24TH SUNDAY IN
ORDINARY TIME

YEAR B

DIVINE OFFICE WEEK IV