



Father Fred's Forty Little Sins as confessed to Mother Agnes

Daily Meditations for Lent

(i) Ash Wednesday to the first Saturday in Lent

By Reverend Christopher Harrison

www.nottinghamchurches.org

Ash Wednesday

Father Fred:

I'm not sure why I am coming to see you, Reverend Mother. I don't think I've really got any sins to confess - at least, not any big ones. I'm not a particularly bad person - in fact I think I'm usually quite good.

Mother Agnes:

Well, I don't want to waste my time on you then. Come back when you've thought of something to tell me. There are lots of other people who want to see me, even if you don't.

F: Hold on a minute - I want to get my money's worth. I'm sure I can think of something ... anyway, I really think you should listen to me before those others. They'll be far less interesting to you than I'll be ...

A: Try me.

F: Let me think for a minute ... funny how one's mind goes blank in the confessional ... it wasn't like this when I was young, free and hadn't given myself to the Lord ...

A: Hurry up. There are people waiting.

F: Well, I could tell you about the time when ... no, perhaps not ... or the embarrassing moment when I ... rather, it was Father B. who actually led me astray, it wasn't my fault ... and yes, I very nearly made a right ass of myself when ... but really, it wasn't as serious as when I let myself and everyone else down in front of the Bishop, who

A: I can give you your penance now if you wish.

F: What? I haven't even confessed anything yet!

A: My dear Father Fred, haven't you noticed how much you love the sound of your own voice? Can't you see when people want to move on from your self-indulgent chatter?

Today's penance is for you to say as little as possible about yourself to other people - and not to say more than one sentence without giving someone else the chance to say what they want to say.

F: Oh.

February 18th - First Thursday in Lent

Mother Agnes:

You're late.

Father Fred:

I'd thought I'd give those other people a chance to see you first, since I'd kept them waiting yesterday.

A: How kind of you.

F: I was also trapped in a meeting about the new parish mission initiative, which went on longer than I had expected.

A: How frustrating for you.

F: Not at all - I actually rather like meetings.
 A: Really? I'm glad I don't have to go to them any more.
 F: They always serve good coffee, and it's a chance to meet my friends. Meetings also help you to feel - how shall I put it - worthwhile.
 A: That may be so, but you should have been here twenty minutes ago.
 F: But yesterday you said it was important to listen to other people when they want to talk to you.
 A: Yes, but you can also become too attached to the feeling of being needed.
 How is the parish administration going these days? I seem to remember it has always been something of a problem.
 F: You're right - there's always too much of it.
 A: Parish administration can also be about serving people, but it's less pleasant than drinking coffee with them.

Your penance for today - this afternoon, do at least five things you need to do but are avoiding doing, before you do anything that you would prefer doing. And whatever you are doing this time tomorrow, make sure you are not late for me.

February 19th - First Friday in Lent

Mother Agnes:

You're on time today. Congratulations.

Father Fred:

Thank you - I made a point of not keeping you waiting this time. I did have to cut a 'phone conversation short, however.

A: I assume it wasn't anything too important.

F: No - in fact I was rather pleased by how briskly I dealt with it. These people who ring you up trying to sell you a new kitchen, or to persuade you to change your telephone service provider, or to get you to answer a list of questions about your consumer preferences ... sometimes you don't even talk to a real person, or - worse - it sounds as if you're talking to someone in India.

A: How do you deal with calls like this?

F: Sometimes I let those computerised messages play for a while - I enjoy trying to spot where the catch is. But when it's a real person on the line, I either just hang up or tell them in no uncertain terms that I won't put up with people who waste my time.

A: How do you feel when someone hangs up on you, or if they tell you you're wasting their time? Are you sure that you never waste anyone's time yourself?

F: This is different. These people are just working in call centres. It's their job.

A: Have you forgotten what our Lord said about not a single sparrow falling to the ground without our heavenly Father knowing? Do

you think he cares for people who work in call centres less than he does for sparrows?

Your penance for today - next time someone telephones you trying to sell you something, treat them as you would someone you met in the street. And remember that they have feelings too.

February 20th - First Saturday in Lent

Mother Agnes:

So how's the inner life this morning, Father? Not too many interruptions by irritating people?

Father Fred:

No - it's been very quiet. I've been able to get on with my work very well.

A: It's already four days into Lent, and we haven't yet talked about what Lent means to you. Are you giving anything up?

F: I'm never very good at that sort of thing. Besides, Christianity is all about being joyful, not morbid.

A: So you think you have the right to go against centuries of the Church's teachings? There was a time when it was virtually obligatory to cut down on meals quite severely during Lent. Even now, our Roman friends are supposed to have only one full meal a day in Lent, with the other two being very light. What example do you think you are setting to your parishioners?

F: I usually only have one full meal a day anyway. So much rushing around - I keep going on coffee and snacks.

A: Lent, then, isn't making much of a difference to you? Apart of course from coming to see me - and don't forget that many people find it quite pleasant to spend quarter of an hour focussed on themselves, even in the confessional.

F: I agree, I suppose I should try harder - otherwise Lent will have slipped away before one realises it. I never was very good at self-discipline - after all, one isn't taught that in theological college these days.

A: The real test of self-discipline is willingly to do what someone else tells you to do, even if you don't agree fully with it. This Lent, ask your wife to suggest something you should give up - and do it. Your reward will be that you can do the same for her.

F: Well, I suppose that's different from chocolate and biscuits. Although it will just encourage her to see the whole year as Lent.