

The Diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf

Province of the Episcopal Church in
Jerusalem and the Middle East



The Right Reverend Sean Semple

Sixth Bishop of the Diocese of
Cyprus and the Gulf

4 March 2025

My beloved brothers and sisters

Last Sunday, many of us might have reflected on the Transfiguration of Jesus in the gospel according to St Luke (9.28-36). It is a most apposite passage, providing a thematic hinge between the glory of the season of Epiphany and the sackcloth of the season of Lent. In prayer, the divinity of Christ was revealed in splendour, and a mystical conversation about Jesus's coming exodus from this world was held with Moses and Elijah—both long dead yet present. Death and life, majesty and suffering are woven together in this mountaintop revelation, drawing us inexorably towards the passion and triumph of our Lord.

If, on Sunday, you continued reading until verse 43, you would have heard how Jesus came down from the mountain and was immediately called to act in mercy and power to liberate a young boy from evil. The needs of the world do not permit any wallowing in spiritual ecstasy: people close by are suffering—there is always purpose and work for the disciples of Christ.

Lent is a time when Christians deliberately descend from the spiritual mountaintops we might attempt to dwell on, and, in practical ways, draw near to God and those who suffer. During a biblically resonant 40 days we enter a liminal time of exile from luxury; a self-imposed wilderness where temptations bite and where we recognise anew how aimlessly we wander when we are disobedient to God. We undertake our Lenten disciplines to make Christ our spiritual first love again, and to become aware of the privileges, power, and self-centredness that hold us captive, and of the needs of people around us. Empowered by the Spirit of Christ, the Lenten journey turns our minds and energies away from self to God and neighbour.

This year, we begin Lent at the same time as our Orthodox brothers and sisters do, and Lent overlaps with the holy month of Ramadan of our Muslim friends. As people of faith, we find ourselves simultaneously united in commitment to prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and works of charity. At a time of global turmoil, such outward expressions of sincere piety and mercy make a difference, for they speak of another way of living and ignite an inextinguishable light of hope in the darkness of division and despair.

As we embark on our Lenten journey with our Lord to his cross and resurrection, we take heart in his victory over sin and death, and pray that his Spirit might renew the face of the earth and ignite the fire of his love in us.

With my love and prayers for a holy and transformative Lent,

+ Sean Cyprus and the Gulf

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