

ST ANDREW'S CHURCH GRAFHAM

'THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK'

Ash Wednesday
17th February 2021

Today is Ash Wednesday marking the start of Lent, a season which is often associated with self-reflection and penitence as well as a degree of asceticism. I wonder how you feel about Lent this year. It might seem as if we have been living in a sort of Lent for months now with bleak grey days, endless rain and, of course, the deprivations of lockdown which mean we haven't be able to engage in many of the things which give us pleasure and enjoyment.

Maybe we need to acknowledge that life has been hard enough recently and that we might need to take Lent a bit more lightly than usual. The preface to the Eucharistic Prayer in the Catholic Mass for the first Sunday in Lent thanks God for giving us this *joyful* season. Perhaps this year really is the time to turn Lent upside down. So how might we see it as a positive time? After all, it is a time of preparation for the great celebration of Easter. In the words of the Catholic missal it is a 'great season of grace'. It might even be exciting!

The origin of the name, Lent, is possibly helpful here. It comes from an Anglo-Saxon word meaning to lengthen. Lent as we know comes as the days begin to lengthen and spring approaches. But maybe there's a bit more to it than that. We can see it as a time when we can grow again, when we can lengthen - stretch out - in our spiritual lives.

One of the Collects for the Sundays before Lent, seems to me to be appropriate for the season of Lent itself:

God of our salvation,
help us to turn away from those habits
which harm our bodies and poison our minds
and to choose again your gift of life,
revealed to us in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

In St John's Gospel, Jesus says, 'I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly'. (John 10:10). What might that abundant life look like for each one of us? How might we embrace it more? Lent is really about opening ourselves up to God so we can receive this gift of new life. It may well involve an element of the 'giving up' associated with Lent. However it's worth questioning the motivation and the mindset which lies behind some of our Lenten practices. I recently heard someone make a distinction between 'Lent resolutions' and 'life resolutions'. What we should be thinking of giving up in Lent are those things which in the words of the Collect 'poison' us by exercising some sort of control over us or by becoming a compulsion and getting in the way of our relationship with God. Lent can be a time to think about what we really desire for ourselves and for our world; to move beyond the superficial to a deeper level. One of the ways in which we can do this is by noticing the things that give us joy and delight. If we then reflect on them, they can help us to recognise those things which are truly life-giving. John Calvin, the

Reformation theologian, wrote, 'There is no deep knowing of God without a deep knowing of the self and no deep knowing of self without a deep knowing of God.' Many of the great spiritual traditions put joy, delight and desire at the centre of our relationship with God. St Ignatius of Loyola believed our own deepest desires are the indicators of God's desires for us, which takes us back to John 10:10.

Perhaps this Lent, above all others, we should be alert to where we find joy in our lives, rejoice in it and give thanks to God as it draws us closer to him.



Wishing you a joyous and blessed Lent
with my love and prayers

Camilla

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