

Dear friends

As I write this letter we are just about to enter the season of Lent – the season when we are meant to think about the journey that Christ made for us here on earth, and especially the days that he spent in the wilderness and his journey towards the cross. It is a time when many people give up something that they like – such as chocolate or alcohol, indeed Graham and I are giving up both again. “Giving up for Lent” should not only give us some idea of how Christ felt when he gave up the comforts of home, family, shelter and regular meals but it should also give us the opportunity to look very carefully at our own lives without the distractions of some of the things that we know are bad for us – and may be appreciate how much of a hold they have on our lives.

But is this all that Lent is about?

Fasting was a form of religious observance throughout the Old Testament. However, the reading from Isaiah 58 which we will have in church on Ash Wednesday strongly suggests that God has no real interest in this kind of activity unless it is accompanied by real changes in behaviour. In those days people would regularly observe days of religious fasting, and, according to this reading, feel very good and pious when they had done so. However, this fasting was not allied to any changes in behaviour – they still put themselves first in all things, they still oppressed their workers and they still quarrelled and fought with their neighbours.

So, in the same way, “giving up for Lent” shouldn’t just be something that we do in order to feel good and pious about ourselves – we too should ensure that it is accompanied by changes in behaviour. So maybe, it would be an idea to think very carefully about exactly what we give up. There is nothing wrong with giving up the food or drinks that we like, as I’ve already said, we ally ourselves with Christ in the wilderness when we do so. But how about giving up other things as well? Things that we “do” like gossiping, hypocrisy or jumping to conclusions about people. May be we could “give up” being so busy that we don’t have time to talk to those around us, or even, “give up” filling our lives with activity and noise so that we can spend a few minutes each day being silent in the presence of God.

Now I know that we will already be a week or two into Lent by the time you read this letter. However, that doesn’t mean that you are off the hook, there is still time to look carefully at our lives and start to “give up” all those things that adversely affect our relationships with both friends and neighbours and also with God. We need to acknowledge what a very special time of year it is. Because just as the longer and lighter days of spring help us to see all the dust and cobwebs that have built up in our homes and give us the impetus to do a bit of spring cleaning, so Lent should be the time when we allow the light of Christ to shine into the dark places of our own lives, bringing to light those things we would like to keep hidden and giving us the ability to “give them up” and deal with them effectively.

Please do feel free to talk to me or any of the other Church leaders in the village if there are any issues that you are struggling with this Lent – or at any other time. Do also bear in mind that St Peter & St Paul’s church is always open during daylight hours if you would simply like to sit and be quiet with God.

Wishing you all a very Blessed and Holy Lent

Love