

Richard reflects on Lent



Rev. Richard Atkinson

Auntie Emily and Uncle Harold were an interesting pair. He was my grandfather's elder brother. They were a childless, perfectly pleasant couple, but one thing about them fascinated my childish self. They were creatures of routine: the same hotel in Fleetwood on the Lancashire coast, for the same two weeks each summer, from their honeymoon to Uncle Harold's death. They ate the same menu at home each week, and on the odd occasion they ventured to my grandparents or to our house, and ate beyond their usual diet, they became overcome with wonder at extraordinary things like apple crumble!! I remember the angst once Uncle Harold had died, as Auntie Emily did not drive and the parish church they attended was too far away to walk. Her decision to go Methodist surprised all and sundry, as did the ease with which she settled into her new spiritual home.

Sometimes it is too easy to fall into the comfort of routines, and the impending journey through Lent invites us to benefit from a changing journey. Traditionally, this season of fasting is seen as a time to give things up. I remember one of my contemporaries at university forgoing tea for Lent and becoming tiresome. It felt like every time you saw him he would bemoan the lack of his essential brew; and once Easter came, he returned to epic consumption levels of his favourite brew. I still wonder if he had it right. Now, I am not going to criticise those who opt to give up cake, biscuits, chocolate etc, but when Easter dawns and some seem to feel the need to make up for lost time, have we really benefited from the exercise of fasting? This is not to doubt the wisdom of eating less, but Lent is not really an invitation to diet, in my head.

Lent, a proper fast, I think, is about doing - taking something up to aid the spiritual dimension. This can be a host of things, from the obviously religious like Bible study and prayer through to a decision to do something in the community as a way of expressing your faith. Some take pilgrimages, walking round neighbouring streets and praying as they go, while others seek one of the many Lenten study guides to help add focus. Others simply spend time with the journey Jesus made, from the temptations to the crucifixion. I have been known to take time to really listen to a piece of music each day. This could be your favourite Christian acts or, as I have

been known to do, listen to instrumental pieces and allow your imagination to draw you towards God. I have even known folk who have used Lent as a time to express their love to family and friends as a means of helping them remember the ways we are blessed by God.

So, my question is, what difference is Lent going to make? The hope surely is that something of our fast continues as we journey through Easter into the year beyond. That Lent should make a difference to an ongoing pilgrimage. As our Lord reveals his solidarity with our human condition, here is our opportunity to walk with him in some way in the hope of drawing closer

May our journey through be a blessing to us and to the Church

Richard