

What are you giving up for Lent asked one of my parishioners— something we might be asking each other at this time? *My house and my ministry here with you!* I replied. As Lent and Ramadan begin together, these sacred periods for fasting and prayer create spaces to reflect on our relationships with God; they also provide an opportunity to think about what matters in life, whatever faith we practise. Pausing and partially withdrawing from the busyness of life can be hard, yet you might welcome this time to stop and simply ‘be’ rather than always ‘doing’ things. Life here in the Rectory is feeling disrupted as I prepare for the move to Wolverhampton; with pictures being taken down, cupboards emptied and rubbish being taken to the tip. With winter gloomy skies, rain falling, and the media continuously reporting bad news, the interruption and abstinence that Lent brings can be something that many people avoid or choose to skip over. Lent however offers the opportunity to grow with God in our wilderness; one of my favourite priests and poets is George Herbert and he reminds us that Lent is a ‘*feast*’ and offers us the opportunity to connect with the joys of God’s love through the renewal of our faith!

In response to my parishioner’s question about giving things up, I also replied that Lent is a time to *take on something*; wilderness spaces in life create opportunities to realise that God is waiting to fill us with spiritual resources for support. It’s in times of unease and uncertainty that we often realise how important our faith is, as we become more aware of our dependency on God who is a ‘*very present help in trouble*’ (ps 46.1). Lent brings us face to face with our weakness, frailty and vulnerability and it’s in these moments that we encounter God who can come like a father to rescue us as prodigal children; God is however more than just being there for our convenience but calls us into a living relationship where we are mutually dependent on each other. Jesus’ life demonstrates this in the Wilderness through to the Cross by his prayers, reliance and trust in his Father and God’s reliance in Christ to fulfil his purposes and will for our salvation.

As we walk in the Wilderness and carry the Cross, Lent now provides us with the opportunity to focus on how God can resource us with his word, his spirit and his presence with others. For me it personally means less time alone on my mobile device and more time in prayer and with people – what will you be withdrawing from and how will you be making time to feast with God? I’m looking forward to journeying together with you very soon and sharing stories of how faith supports our relationship with God. May this time of searching and discovering God’s gifts for us, continue to resource us and be one which will prepare us for resurrection at Easter and the next chapter of our life at St Peter’s and St John’s. Please pray for me as I prepare for this.

Part of a prayer from late Eric Milner-White, former Dean of King’s College Cambridge and York.

Lord bless me this Lent.

*Lord, let me fast most truly and profitably by feeding in prayer on thy Spirit:
reveal me to myself in the light of thy holiness.*

Make my whole effort be to return to thee;

O make it serious and sincere persevering and fruitful in result,

by the help of thy Holy Spirit and to thy glory, my Lord and my God.