

## The Chaplain writes...*about Lent*

Amazingly, although it seems but the twinkling of an eye since Christmas, we are now on the edge of Lent. It is, of course, a time of *discipline* and also one in particular of *self-restraint* – expressed traditionally through the three activities of *prayer, fasting and almsgiving*.

No doubt you will have personally given some thought as to how these are to be expressed in your own lives this year. And we all have particular favourite things to ‘give up for Lent’. These tangible signs of our love for God are helpful, but so, equally, is *taking something up* for Lent.

Like, perhaps, reading a book to enrich your faith. Nowadays, it is easier than ever to find a wealth of good literature readily available and the ‘Kindle revolution’ means that you can take books with you everywhere – even on your phone – and read whenever you find a few minutes spare. Like when waiting for a tram or for an appointment.

With the plethora of available material, comes the question *where do I start?* So may I perhaps suggest one or two possibilities for the coming season of Lent?

Thinking about Christ’s Paschal Mystery is right at the centre of this season, and there are two very recently published books (both available on Kindle) that may be useful to you in rather different ways. There is Rowan Williams’ *God with Us* which explores the meaning of the Cross and the Resurrection ‘then and now’ as the subtitle states. Characterised by Bishop Rowan’s profound scholarship, yet presented in an extremely readable form, this book helps us to look back to the formative events of our faith, to discover the impact upon the first disciples and the early Church, and then encourages us to look anew at the situation in which we find ourselves today called to proclaim Christ’s dying and rising.

Rather different is another very recently published work on the Cross of Christ, *Hanging by a thread* – by Sam Wells, of St Martin’s-in-the-

fields. Dr Wells sees the Cross of Christ no longer, if it ever was, as an 'answer' to the problems of humanity, but rather as a *question*. A question about *God, existence and us*. The cross he writes is *not an answer that leaves us comfortable and assured: it is a question that leaves our faith hanging by a thread*. In this book, the author explores six questions posed by the cross – about the *story and history* itself, about *trust*, about *mortality*, about *purpose*, about *power* and finally about *love*. There is an underlying conviction in this book that we need to stay at the foot of the cross rather longer than we are accustomed to do – to stay with its *questions* before we rush off to their resolution and our answers.

A third possibility is the Archbishop of Canterbury's Lent Book. Tradition has been that the Archbishop has asked someone to write a Lent Book which will be his recommendation, but this year (I think for the first time) Archbishop Justin Welby has written his own. *Dethroning Mammon* explores the theme of *making money serve grace*. In his foreword to the book, Jean Vanier speaks of the great divide in our world today, a divide that the message of Lent should address, being the division between rich and poor. He speaks of the liberation which comes when Mammon is first of all recognised and then dethroned by the Risen Christ whom we are called to serve in true freedom. Archbishop Justin takes as a key text the parable of the pearl of great price (S. Matthew 13:45-46) and explores how first we may recognise Mammon and its subtle influences upon us, how we see things, how we value them, and how pervasive is the temptation to become acquisitive. The second half of this book looks towards our liberation by Christ from false ways of seeing, valuing and acquiring. Exploring issues of money and power, we discover freedom when our perspectives on these areas of life are rooted firmly in Christ.

If you wish to both *give up* and *take up* during Lent, a recent mail-out from the Church of England's Ministry Division, gave a very helpful suggestion for something to give up for Lent. *Give up being busy* the writer advised! Personally, I have always tried to never give the impression of being very busy – not least because it is frequently a self-justifying excuse. But in the kind of world in which we live and with pressures ever increasing, there is much sense in the notion of giving up being busy! For those of you who find that there really are

not enough hours in the day, might I suggest a very helpful (and cheap as well as short) book by Stephen Cherry, Dean of King's College, Cambridge. *Beyond Busyness – Time Wisdom in an hour* certainly won't break the bank (£1.99 by Kindle) and it might break a habit of busyness for its own sake. Dr Cherry writes that the developed world is suffering from an epidemic of major proportions, and the disease at the heart of it is busyness. We are addicted to doing one thing after another with as little down-time as possible. This is a sickness, a spiritual sickness. And it has dire consequences in our lives...

One last recently published book looks forward to the time beyond Lent and is particularly for those who may have given up alcohol! *The Spirituality of Wine* is written by Gisela H Kreglinger, a Lutheran theologian and a wine-grower from Bavaria, where her vineyard has been in the family since the 17<sup>th</sup> century. I heartily recommend this study of the place of wine in our culture and its theological significance. But sometimes it just has to be accompanied by a glass of its subject! Could be interesting reading prior to taking up the suggestion from the Social Group of a *wine tasting evening* – see elsewhere in this Newsletter!

There are other possibilities in store for Lent at Holy Trinity this year – including the opportunity to engage with someone who has received training in spiritual direction, which has been mentioned on Sunday mornings. We are all more than capable of finding ourselves tied up in our attempts to pray – why not try some unravelling this Lent with someone's help, encouragement and presence?

On Friday lunchtimes during Lent, there will be another opportunity to meet up, to learn and discuss with others, along the theme of *Receiving Christ – in five different ways* using material put together as this year's 'York Course'. Each session will have an introductory talk by a leading Christian figure, followed by some questions for discussion. More details in the weekly bulletin.

Meanwhile, on Sunday mornings I will be exploring some aspects of Anglicanism's heritage, with reference to the current

commemorations of the beginning of the Reformation, 500 years ago.

However you keep Lent, I pray that it will be a time of blessing for you as we all enter more deeply the mystery of Christ's Paschal sacrifice.

*Alic Gordon*