

LENT 2

Lord God Almighty, grant your people grace to withstand the temptations of the world, the flesh and the devil, and with pure hearts and minds to follow you, the only God; through Jesus Christ our Lord'.
(Collect for Lent 2)

Lent is a time to scrutinise our various indulgences - the time we spend - the money we spend - the emotional energy we expend - on things which are not conducive to a Christian discipleship. Many of our addictions are mirrored in the kind of press which has developed in the popular newspapers and on television. More and more it is geared to the assumption that something dramatic happens every hour of the day. The words which sell newspapers are 'SENSATION' 'REVELATIONS' 'SCANDAL' and so on. Television soaps have us believe that something shocking or dramatic happens every day in peoples lives. This is not so. Most of life is routine. News reporters are bent on portraying life as sensational and dramatic. Hence the inexcusable invasion of privacy which hounded Princess Diana and the unhealthy curiosity of the reporter who asked a woman who had just lost a child; "What does it feel like?"

To refrain in Lent from such excesses would restore a balanced perspective and an ability to keep things in a true proportion.

We also seem to be developing a society which is geared to 'instant' success and fulfilment. We are constantly lured by the

promise of short-cuts to success in wealth - National lottery - personal relationships - one can win the girl of one's dreams by buying the best car - or in one's career - ambition is presented as the noblest of virtues and the ruthless pursuit of it is highly recommended. 'You must get on in the world my boy.'

The church itself is no exception to this lust for success and for instant satisfaction. But, true Christian discipleship is marked by an ability to live with success and failure. Most human lives are not huge success stories and at the centre of the Christian story is in fact a massive failure; St. Paul called it weakness and foolishness:- namely, the crucifixion. In 1Cor. 1:18 St. Paul writes this :_ 'This doctrine of the cross is sheer folly to those on their way to ruin, but to us who are on the way to salvation it is the power of God'. So, the ability to cope with disappointment and failure depends on the amount of concern we invest in the self. Christ's principle that he who loses himself shall find his true self is central to Christian discipleship.

So Lent is a time for the exercise in self-giving which is alone the antidote to excessive addiction to the sort of egotism where we are gripped by self concern. The exercise consists of giving more time - more money - more energy - more care to other people. In this we discover the reality of what we call 'grace'. 'Lord God Almighty grant us grace to withstand the temptations of the world'. We don't in this day and age speak of being possessed by demons but the state of mind in which we are constantly battling against our emotions, our impulses and contradictions is very clearly described by Jesus in terms of a kingdom which is divided against

itself. Even in our most sincere and deeply felt loves we find that we are still deeply aware of ourselves in the loving. Only God gives us truly self-giving love. There is no greater love than this, that someone should lay down his life for his friends. (John 15:13)

The Christian gospel is that through the grace of God we are enabled to make our own, be identified with and participate in God's self-giving act of love in Christ. This is at the heart of our Eucharist in which we receive the Body and Blood of Christ. This love is seen to culminate in Good Friday and is the basis of the Easter hallelujah.

AMEN