

My Dear Friends

Whether Easter comes early or late, the chief part of Lent usually falls in March. Lenten tide, means spring tide, was the Old Saxon name for this month. It is the time when we remember the great fast of our Lord when He went into the wilderness for forty days.

It is not demanded of us, but it is a good thing to make some effort of self-denial during the Lenten season. Not matter how frugally we may live in the ordinary way there is always some little personal indulgence that we can give up, not as an exercise in piety but as an act of self-discipline. The voluntary offering of this Lenten sacrifice is no mere religious observance. There is a deep wisdom underlying it. It is sound psychology.

We all need to do something occasionally to stiffen up the will. It is apt to grow soft in our increasingly secular and scientific civilisation with its many and varied distractions and temptations, its increased opportunities for pleasure and low moral values. There is a danger of our wills becoming weak through lack of exercise. Lent gives us just the chance and the reason we need to toughen the fibres of the mind.

Through prayer we must keep on coming back again and again to God who is the source of all strength. We cannot afford to wander too far away from the point at which we get into contact with the healing and quietness that can only come from discourse with Our Father in Heaven. To my mind it is essential to work our prayers and meditations into our daily lives. At the end of Mass we use amongst others, a Vestry prayer that contains these words, "that we put our faith to practice in our Daily Lives."

It is so easy to forget when circumstances press in and threaten to crush you, but if we rest in God and place our lives in His hands then all will be well. But remember this, the closer you get to God through His Son Jesus Christ, the more vulnerable you will become to attacks of the Devil. All of us in our own way are trying to do the work of the Lord, no matter how great or how small, it does not matter.

Being a practicing Christian is not easy nor ever has been. Many are feeling nervous, unsure of the future and often see or think dark things of the mind that simply do not exist. Faith is not something that you can see, feel or touch it is the means by grace that God has given each human soul to converse directly with Him through our prayers. "Father, hear the prayer we offer." Father John Appleton always used to deal with questions that have no human understanding in matters of Faith, as that of the Great Mystery of our Christian religion.

Our lives are shaped by Him, our Creator God. His will is our Destiny, so when you feel that you can't go forward, go back, back to the beginnings of your first unquestioning Faith. Remember always, "In returning and rest shall ye be saved". Isaiah 30.15

May Almighty God Bless and Protect You All.

Yours In Christ Jesus

Father Ian+

"Deare Lent"

"Welcome, deare Feast of Lent !" wrote George Herbert. It is a cry so vigorous and enthusiastic that it compels reflection on the meaning of the Lenten Season. There are those who associate Lent with doom and gloom, denial and self-negation, unwelcome and restrictive discipline, yet for others, like that poet priest in the seventeenth century, Lent is a celebration. Perhaps no season in the Christian year so attracts both negative attention and positive proclamation. Lent is fasting and feasting, discipline and delight, pancakes and pilgrimage, burden and blessing. Lent is, like love, a many-splendoured thing. It is rightly welcome.

Associated with the Lenten season are many facets of the faith and the spiritual life. Its primary link is with spring, so it positively points to new beginnings. Early church links are with training for discipleship. It was associated with forgiveness and reconciliation, consciously expressed in the receiving back into communion of true penitents. The journey from Ash Wednesday to Easter is a pilgrimage profoundly touched by the sufferings of the Lord. It is the search for "whole-souled loveliness" (as a Celtic blessing describes it) in journeying with Jesus through the pain of Calvary, the gross darkness of the decant into hell and the glory of the Garden of the Resurrection.

"Deare Lent" is then welcome not as a time of giving something up (though that is not an unuseful discipline) but of grasping something new and life-giving. Its prime purpose is the pursuit of holiness. "There is nothing negative or killjoy about holiness," the late David Watson assures us. Mother Teresa puts it in a marvellously positive and exciting way : "Holiness consists in doing the will of God . . . with a smile.

But there are times when it is hard to smile, and such times are now. Horrific pictures of human tragedy, in war and earthquake, push our ability to watch and absorb it to the limit as the sights of sufferings are brought into our safe and comfortable homes. There is suffering on a scale so vast and unbelievable - as was the Holocaust 60 years ago. We cannot travel the Lenten Way without facing, yet again, the sheer mystery of suffering. Yet at the same time we are in the company of him who turned death in to life, defeat into victory, hopelessness into hope. Welcome, deare Lent, for your coming takes us to the deep places where the worst has to be encountered while we are assured that the best is yet to be.

"Practical holiness and entire self-consecration to God are not sufficiently attended to by modern Christians in this country." That was said even before the twentieth century began, by the famous Anglican, Bishop Ryle. If it is equally true today, then let the world - but not least the church - welcome deare Lent and its invitation to travel on the Lenten road to holiness. And to do it, if it is possible, with a smile.

Dennis Duncan