

WEEKLY SERMON

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A time for reflection, prayer and sacrifice

I am so looking forward to the start of Lent.

Shrove Tuesday, or Pancake Day as we called it at home when I was a nipper, is just the bees' knees: pancakes with syrup, pancakes with lemon and sugar (a must have if you've never had that topping), pancakes with Nutella spread, or preferably all three!

Repetitive Tradition is a great source of comfort in these times especially. The cycle of the Christian year, with its great festivals, provides anchor points for us as individuals, churches and as a nation. They breed a sense of familiarity, of coming together.

Lent is a time for reflection, prayer and, yes, sacrifice.

'What are you giving up for Lent?' is such a familiar cry.

I have tried foregoing chocolate in the past but gave up on that one years ago. Just impossible for a Cadbury addict!

This year for me it will be foregoing second helpings. I've managed it before and will, by the Grace of God, manage it this year.

For reasons best known to myself I have come to associate the disciplines of Lent with Christ's forty days in the wilderness. This was a critical part of the Gospel story, a testing time for Jesus that more than proved his fitness to do what had to be done in the next three years of his ministry among us.

In Luke chapter 4 we read: 'And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan, and was led by the Spirit for 40 days in the wilderness, tempted by the devil.'

Do you feel that the last year has been a wilderness for us all? I certainly do. I've found it hard to cope with in ways I never imagined I would be challenged. And yes, I've felt the insidious presence of evil in my daily life.

But Christ gave Satan a bloody nose in the Judean desert. Evil knew there and then that it had met its match. And Lent can once again provide us with a means to regroup, seek God's grace and inspiration, and anticipate the glory of Easter.

In Paul's letter to the Colossians, he writes of Jesus: "And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross."

Those powers and authorities are not the earthly ones, but the spiritual ones. Evil has been battered into submission by Christ's willing sacrifice of himself.

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So, take time in Lent to reflect on this victory, and the price it exacted from our Lord, and know that we are a saved and justified people, whatever the virus may do to the world.

But make sure you've beefed yourself up with plenty of pancakes next Tuesday. Forty days is a long time to go without pancakes ... of first helpings, never mind second!

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