

## Keeping a Holy Lent

Anglicans are odd.

Now obviously I don't mean *you*, reading this letter just now, although no doubt you have your moments!

I mean all of us, as a church community, in the way that we prepare for Lent. This is because on the Sunday before Lent, (known as Quinquagesima Sunday in old money) we do something odd.

Most of the year, Sunday by Sunday, we use the same bible readings as other Christian denominations. It is good to share. But on the Sunday before Lent, Anglicans (and some others!) make themselves the odd ones out by departing from what other denominations are doing by having readings that emphasise the *glory* of God. This was particularly shown this year in the story of the Transfiguration of Jesus from the Gospel of St Luke (chapter 9, verses 28-36, in case you want to remind yourself). In this passage Jesus takes Peter, James and John up the mountain to pray, and in a great vision of God's glory he is changed, transfigured, so that his face and clothes dazzle the disciples. After this they come down from the mountain and Jesus turns towards Jerusalem, where he knew that his destiny and the destiny of the whole world will come together.

Lent, which begins on Ash Wednesday (6<sup>th</sup> March) is a time of preparation for Holy Week and Easter, the events in the life of Jesus that perhaps cause us great pain to relive, but which also give us the reason that we dare to call ourselves Christian. For centuries people have tried to keep these 40 days holy by focusing on the 'three pillars of Lent'- prayer, fasting and giving to charity.

Whatever our circumstances, most of us can find a way to do one or all of these. We might pray more often (or differently). We might refrain from eating or drinking something in particular or on certain days to remind ourselves of our need to hunger for God's salvation. We might give more to charitable causes to remind ourselves that our material possessions are not the most important thing about us.

And why do odd Anglicans begin this season by thinking about God's glory? If you're anything like me it is perhaps because we need to remind ourselves of why we bother with Lent in the first place. The church 'does' Lent because the glory of Easter is worth preparing for. God does all the hard work- we aren't earning salvation for ourselves no matter how much we give to charity- but Jesus came to

share in our humanity, so in response we try, humbly and as best we can to share in his life as he lived it.

A prayer for Lent:

Almighty God,  
may this season of Lent prepare me  
body, mind and soul,  
to walk with Christ the way of his cross  
and to share with Christ the joy of his resurrection.  
Amen.

### **Ways to keep Lent in the Parish of Jarrow and Simonside**

- Attend an extra service. N.B. There is a 3 o'clock service of Stations of the Cross at St John's each Sunday, which we keep unique to Lent.
- Make time each day for 5 minutes of quiet with God.
- Buy a book of Lent reflections from Rev Gilly.
- Come to the Lent groups, held along with other denominations each Wednesday evening at St Bede's (7-8 pm).
- Join others in the parish in donating to WaterAid.
- Give something up that you will miss!
- Fast on Wednesdays and/or Fridays during Lent (which traditionally means eating only one main meal)
- Make an effort to participate the Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday services.