

Lent 1; Yr B; 2021

Gospel: Mark 1: 12-15

Epistle: 1 Peter 3: 18-22

First Reading: Genesis 9: 8-15

As I mentioned on Ash Wednesday the word “Lent” is the Old English word for “Springtime”, though as a rule our weather is not very Spring-like. And the word “Lent” is only used in English speaking countries. Different names are used in other countries. In Germany, for instance, it is called “Fastenzeit” the “Fasting Time.” In Spain it is called “la Cuaresma” (40 days). In Danish it is called “Fasteiden” or period of fasting. Certainly in the Church calendar it is known as the “period of forty days”a time of special effort when we spend a little more time looking in at ourselves instead of looking out at others.

It used to mean children going without sweets, mothers doing without sugar in their tea and dads without cigarettes in their mouths. I suppose this still does happen, but by and large the fashion seems to have died out for we are told that it is too easy for such penances to touch only the body and get nowhere near the soul. But is that too sweeping a statement? If we come out of Lent having given up sweets and sugar and cigarettes, no better than when we went in, at least having made the effort makes us stop and ask “why?” At least today, with the Coronavirus, we cannot say Lent is locked up in Church because we cannot get into Church and let it be locked up there. We’ve got to observe Lent....and all that it means.... at home.

We all know where Lent came from. Just look at today's Gospel. The Spirit led Jesus out into the wilderness where he spent forty days and forty nights fasting and praying. This was to prepare himself for the greatest mission of all time. He was testing himself so that he would be strong in mind and will in the months ahead. The Church was quick to imitate its founder and so we have Lent each year.

But we must not forget that the whole idea, as Jesus said when he came out of his Lent in the desert, is to repent and believe in the Good News. Repenting, as we have heard so often, means a complete change of heart.....a turning round and getting rid of things that get in the way. Our Lenten penances of doing without something, putting in something extra, contribute to the measure of self-control we need to put others before self. To keep our temper rather than lose it. To give rather than to take. And all the other things which are so easy to say but so hard to do.

So, I am all in favour of reintroducing, if needs be, all the old fashioned "do withouts" which we all used to help each other to keep. It is, at least, a constant renewal of effort and a daily reminder that we are trying to be followers of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Blessings.....and keep safe.

Fr. Derek