

## March 2019

For the Christian Church everything builds up to the celebration of Easter - it's the celebration of the Resurrection around which our whole faith hinges; Lent, which begins on March 6<sup>th</sup> this year, is the time when we try to get ourselves organised - in our hearts, minds, souls and bodies - for that most significant event in the year.

Before we get too hung up about Lent being exclusively a time of self-denial, "giving things up," or what used to be called "mortification", we need to remember that giving things up, going without, living more simply, however we are going to phrase it, is a means to an end and not the end itself.

Lent is about deepening our relationship with the source of life, with the God of overflowing love, mercy and forgiveness. If we give something up or take on something in addition to our normal routines, we do it to concentrate our attention on that relationship by removing the things which tend to distract us from it. That's the justification for fasting, self-denial, almsgiving, the three traditional ways of keeping a good Lent.

Our ancestors in the faith knew a thing or two about getting close to God. It's important, even if our perspectives inevitably can't be the same, not to think we can't learn from them. The qualities we need to approach Lent are the qualities of faith, confidence, discipline, and the right kind of humility and humanity to be able to be with the Lord in prayer, in worship and in our relationships with others and to be able to learn from him and them. What we don't need is the scepticism, cynicism, downright incivility and incoherent anger which seem to characterise so much of life at present.

Appropriately for March, Lent is the springtime of the Church's year. It's a time of growth and new beginnings, a concerted attempt to prevent the atrophy and fossilisation of our discipleship, which at its heart is not about assenting to dogma and creeds (though they are always needed to point us in the right direction,) but about a relationship of faith and hope and love - which, like any other relationship in our lives, has to be worked at and developed.

Above all else, Lent should be about changing the direction of our lives. It is not saying that what we are doing the rest of the time is necessarily wrong, but that Lent throws down a challenge to each one of us and invites us to walk in the direction of the things that really matter and the true values of the Gospel.

**Fr Michael**