

## Shrove Tuesday Agapancake February 12<sup>th</sup> 2013

### Giving up? Letting go

Genesis 3  
Mark 7.1-13

In nomine...

Agapancake. Such fun. And now after all is the time for frivolity for Lent is upon us. No more Alleluias until Easter Day. No chocolate eggs until Easter Day. No cigarettes, or alcohol, or coffee, or sweet treats... I guess it's just as much Ban Cake day as Pancake Day. Do you see what I did there?

In all seriousness I expect you may have begun to think about what you might be about to give up. Because we think Lent is about giving up. Not the most extreme kind of simply-crawling-under-the-duvet giving-up, but giving something up so that we can deny ourselves, fast, be abstinent. Very upright, very righteous.

But Lent isn't about being upright or righteous, it's not about showing how strong our will is, but it's about discipline in a broader sense. Discipline is, after all, about learning. It's about being a disciple. And what Lent is really about is discipleship.

Even so, discipleship sounds a bit like we can get it all sorted ourselves. We can take charge, we can be righteous all by ourselves. We can say no to whatever it is that we have given up. We can observe our fast diligently, strictly. But our Gospel reading (set for today, I haven't just chosen it randomly) tells of Jesus' words to the Pharisees, "You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions."

We have to be careful that our Lent is truly disciplined. Not to show how good we are at giving something up, not to demonstrate to ourselves, to others, and to God, how good we are at upholding the tradition of a fast. Not to let go of the commands of God in order to hold on to human traditions. But rather, to let go of human concerns in order to hold on to the commands of God.

The discipline of Lent is not about doing what we can to make ourselves Godly. It is about doing what we can to let God make us Godly. It is like tilling the soil and letting God sow the seed and give the growth. We can make ourselves fertile for the transformation that God offers us, but we cannot effect such transformation by ourselves. Humility is indeed little about being people of the ground, the soil, and again, more of that tomorrow with our ashes and dust.

We have to let go of the idea that we can do it all ourselves. We have to let go of our concerns, our anxieties, our desire to be in control. Which involves a great deal of trust, humility, and patience. All we can truly do in Lent is make ourselves the most fertile soil for God and wait for his transforming presence and grace to blossom in our lives.

Our first reading was the Fall. Sin comes into the world. We are all sinful. We can't help it, however hard we try. We can certainly do our best, but we will always be sinful. We need God to redeem us. We need Christ to restore us. We need the divine love of the Trinity to heal us. I'm not saying 'before the Fall we were perfect, then Adam and Eve came along and got it all wrong for us'. The Bible tells us this story not as chronological fact but rather as an ancient admission of our sinfulness, a human acknowledgement of the truth of our sin, and our inability to deal with it

ourselves. We need someone else to help us. Jesus our Saviour. Our Lent does not culminate with ourselves on the cross. It culminates with Jesus on the cross.

Lent isn't about being tied down, restrained. Lent is about being free, being open to God. What we choose to do with Lent should be simply focused on being open to God. Perhaps there are things that get in the way of you and God – tiny addictions, obsessions, or thought processes that are destructive and hurtful either to yourselves or to others. Notice them, look at them straight on, and ask God to help you be free of them. Perhaps there are things, activities, or people that you idolise and are so central in your life that God cannot occupy your centre. Offer them to God so that you might get your priorities right. Perhaps you are driven by guilt or pride or greed in even the smallest, most ordinary of ways. Let go of what hinders you, give it up to God. Lent is about sacrifice but only truly understood: offering to God things that stand in his way, giving up to God things that curtail our freedom to be loved by him, freely giving to God all that makes up our lives and who we are, so that he can grow his image in us.

Lenten freedom: giving up human traditions and impulses to hold more closely to, and be held more closely by, God.

So some thoughts...

You might want to make your coffee times times of thanksgiving, when you give God five precious minutes of your time daily to notice things that you are thankful for, or would like to be thankful for.

Or you can practise serving others – simply for the sake of serving them, not to get anything out of it yourselves. Remind yourselves that we are all equal, my work isn't more important than yours, let me do the washing up.

Or you could try and invite God into every tiny detail of your life. When you are walking into college, you could ask your friend and mentor 'How am I doing so far this morning?' and reflect on the brusque way you spoke to a neighbour as you were leaving the flat, or how you didn't notice the simple miracles of the snowdrops - or the ice at the roadside. Ask him 'how can I serve you today?'

Or you could simply try and practise being open to God in contemplation, prayer, and listening to God in all the day-to-day moments of your lives.

Or you can choose a book that might help you become more open to God, and read a section or a poem or whatever whatever days you can during Lent.

There are so many possibilities, and no rules. After all, Jesus here teaches losing human rules to gain the love of God. Just be open to how God wants to bless you during Lent. Give up? Let go.

Let go of the things that clutter your mind, that stop you connecting with God. Give up to God your worries, cares, and anxieties. Let go of the idea that you have to deserve God. Because you don't, and you can't.

Let go, and let God.