

Once again we are in the season of Lent.

If Lent is to mean anything in our lives, it has to be a season of change and renewal.

The word itself symbolises springtime, a lengthening of days. It's a time for new life, for fresh beginnings, for growth and therefore a time for change. The idea is that we die with Christ, like a seed in the ground, and rise with him to more abundant life. We die to sin and rise to integrity; we die to selfishness and rise to generosity, we prune ourselves through penance, growing and changing into stronger healthy Christians. Jesus said, "If anyone will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me". We put ashes on our forehead on Ash Wednesday as a sign of that death to the selfish self. We hope to change.

I expect many of you are saying I don't like change: not many of us do. But it is a necessity in our Christian lives. Just think back to all the changes you have faced and overcome.

Do you remember your first day at school?

Senior school; your first job; leaving home, getting married, having children. All significant changes yet we have come through. Then the children leave home - we adjust, the pleasure of grandchildren, we retire, change again. We get older and some loose a loved one. Some fear the future. I can't believe my life has just flashed before my eyes.

Lent is a stretching time, a challenging time, a growing time and a changing time. Perhaps our Lenten observances involve what we call hardship. People often give up things during Lent like sweets, alcohol, and other delights. I have no quarrel with that. It's all part of the Lenten spirit and a matter of self-control. Some people vow to take up something extra, to be more active, more prayerful, kinder, and more generous. Some things we find hard others prove to make us feel good about ourselves. But let's just remember that Lent is not primarily about the extraordinary, the luxuries; it's about those things that are part of our everyday lives. Lent is a time when we make a fresh start; we change when we try again, a little bit more earnestly, with sincerity and honesty to live up to the responsibilities and challenges of our Christian lives.

There is little point if we are going to revert back to sinful ways as soon as Lent is over.

We can gorge ourselves on Easter Day, we don't have to be nice or kind or generous, we can return to our own selfish ways. But this is a time, an opportunity to change for the better. A permanent change. And I can understand you saying who are you to say this, because I am the world's worst person to resist

temptation. I wish I could be more like Christ.

I wonder and worry for the people of Ukraine. How are they feeling, I pray God is close to them, whether they be Christians or not. They are God's creation and he cares deeply for them

It's rather poignant that whilst we here are pondering what to give up for Lent, most of Ukraine have nothing to give up. I hope and pray they are taking up prayer and not weapons. May God be with them.

We read today of the temptations of Jesus, his time spent in the wilderness. How he overcame the Devil and obeyed God his Father

So let's look at the gospel reading afresh, There are three temptations mentioned, the turning of stones into bread, the temptation of throwing himself off the highest point of the temple and expecting God to save him and finally being shown all the kingdoms which could be his if he worshipped the devil.

I wonder if you would have been tempted with any or all of those promises. Make no mistake the devil prowls around trying to deceive us all the time. We have to be on our guard.

It says Jesus had already been in the desert or wilderness for forty days and nights without food. If the devil had come right at the beginning of his fasting we can understand how he would resist and come up with his answer, but after forty days could we resist temptation like he did?

The second temptation, throw yourself off a high point because God will save you. This reminds me of the story of the man who fell off a steep cliff and got caught in the branches of the tree half way down. Mountain rescue clambered down to him from the top of the cliff but when he looked up at the sheer cliff face he wouldn't go with them. "It's alright" he said, "God will rescue me". Then the coast guard and lifeboat came for him, but he looked down at the raging waves and couldn't let go. "It's alright" he said, "God will rescue me". A helicopter appeared in the sky and hovered over him and a winch was sent down with a rescuer but again he looked at the cable swinging in the wind and declined. "It's alright" he said, "God will rescue me".

Of course darkness came and he fell and died.

Up in Heaven he met God and asked him why he hadn't saved him. God was perplexed; I sent the mountain rescue, the coast guard and life boat. I even sent the helicopter but you ignored my help. Wow I wonder how many times God tries to save us from sin and we ignore his help - It's worth thinking about. Jesus said "Do not put the Lord your God to the test", don't we do that all the time?

The final temptation put before Jesus was to worship the devil and his reward would be “all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour”. Jesus responded of course with the words “Away with you Satan, for it is written, Worship the Lord your God and serve only him.”

As children of God we are also children of the kingdom and we have in fact already been given this world and all its splendour, to steward and care for, as part of our worship of God the creator. We need always to ensure, like Jesus, that the beauty of the earth prompts praise and thanks to our God.

Do you think Jesus changed after his temptations, after his 40 days in the wilderness?

He had no sinful ways to repent of, yet he went hungry and was thirsty, I expect he was cold at night and according to Mark was frightened by wild animals, So why did he do it? It happened just after his baptism when he was openly recognised as the Son of God. We had not heard of him healing anyone prior to this. He hadn't yet started his ministry. Maybe he had read and taught the scriptures but something new and exciting was going to happen after his wilderness experience.

I believe he was changed by his experience in the desert, for he began his ministry in earnest, proclaiming the love of God, our Salvation and Redemption, the promise of eternal life, the forgiveness of our sins. He obviously renewed his relationship with God.

It was as if he had been activated, indeed Matthew, Mark and Luke all say he was filled with the Holy Spirit. He was prepared and ready to do his Father's Will.

I think we should all spend time in the desert, renewing our knowledge of God and sharing and basking in his love. We should be preparing ourselves ready to be worthy Christians to share in the joy to come. This is a season of self-discipline, fasting and repentance. If fasting and prayer is the way then bring it on as the saying goes. Do not give up at the first temptation or failure but persevere, seek the Lord's help, ask for strength and courage. He knows what we are capable of, he knows our weaknesses. He wants us to change, to grow more like Jesus.

I am just wondering how we can make this Lent meaningful, how Lent 2022 can really make a difference.

We can all say that we are getting older but that is not an excuse for being lax in our Lenten discipline. Ok some of us would become physically ill if we fasted all day, we may have medical problems; but getting older should mean that we are wiser, more mature in our faith and therefore closer to God.

Truthfully if we are growing disciples, maturing in our faith, then each yearly observation of this season should go deeper, because surely our relationship with

God has grown deeper and stronger.

Healthy disciples are those whose lives are gradually being transformed, changed into the likeness of Jesus Christ. This means changing our lives, living our lives differently, with purpose, with hope, with faith, and trusting in God alone.

Amen.v