

Father Michael's Musings
March 2022

We will spend practically all of March in the season of Lent. When I was a boy, Lent meant giving up candy for what seemed an eternity. As adults, we still fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday and abstain on all other Fridays. By Fasting, we mean eating a minimal amount of food for the day, and especially avoiding meats or other rich foods. Abstinence is refraining from eating meat, while being moderate in our food intake.

Many of us remember eating cod cakes or fish sticks on Fridays, not only during Lent, but all year. Abstinence and fasting have their roots in the ancient church. Jesus told his disciples that they needed to fast and pray if they were to confront the worst of the demons. He also set the example for Lent by his own prayer and fasting in the desert for 40 days before He started His public ministry. For Anglicans, fasting also had a practical purpose. In the 1600's, England had secured the rights to the fishing grounds in the North Atlantic. Early versions of the Book of Common Prayer urged abstinence on Wednesdays and Fridays for both piety, and also to promote and protect the fisheries and help the emerging industry. The Anglican Church was reliably practical in such matters.

In addition to "abstinence" from meat on Fridays, we also abstain, or give up, other comfortable habits for the Lenten period. Typically, that would be use of alcohol or tobacco, or avoidance of sweets. These are pious activities that lessen our dependence on earthly comforts and help us to focus on our eternal joy and salvation. By making these small sacrifices, we imitate and respect the great sacrifices that Jesus made for our salvation.

However, giving things up is not enough to have a profitable and holy Lent. We also need to practice charity and prayerfulness in the place of the time and energy we spent on our earthly comforts. If we pulled all the weeds from a field, it would not produce a garden unless we planted good seeds and cultivated them. Without the positive action, random new weeds would infest the field and leave it as bad or worse than it started. Similarly, if we don't fill the time and energy we gain from our Lenten sacrifices with charity and prayerfulness, the idle time and energy will be co-opted by temptation and we run the risk of being in worse shape spiritually than when we made our Lenten pledges. As we go into Lent, let's all be mindful of both those things we want to give up, but also the Godly habits and prayerfulness that we will employ in their place. Then we will all have a holy and profitable Lent.

Yours in Christ,

Father Michael