

# Lent: A time to reflect...



*"The earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the deep..."*

Genesis 1:2

This year Ash Wednesday falls on the 22nd of February and marks the great penitential season of the Church's year. Traditionally, the forty days before Easter (forty-six if you include Sundays) are a focus for reflecting on the story of Jesus being tempted in the desert before he begins his ministry of teaching and healing. Christians around the world often use this time to reflect on those areas of their lives that they wish to reform and amend, sometimes aided by exercises of self-denial e.g., giving up sweets and alcohol or by taking on extra challenges - more time for reading and exercise, less time for television and screens. Alongside attempts to develop wholesome life-enhancing habits, the aim and purpose is to identify more closely with the trials that Jesus endured in his tribulations, making the penitent more ready for a joyful celebration of the Resurrection come Easter morning.

Arresting bad habits is a good and necessary thing if human beings are to flourish. A child who fails to learn the importance of self-discipline will struggle to structure day-to-day living activities in such a way as to enjoy a balanced life. The consequences are likely to be a life of excess followed by chronic illness

before an untimely death. Teaching a child that too many sweets are bad for you is encouraging a child to learn to say 'No!' to all sorts of temptations that will inevitably come their way later on. In Christian speak, the word 'sin' has been used for centuries to describe those activities that impact on life negatively and even cause harm to both the self and others. Some 'sins' might be viewed as being small and even trivial – a white lie – whilst others – war – are seen to be such big sins they are denoted as being evil. The complex range of what is sinful has, over generations, been divided up between those sins that are essentially personal e.g., not looking after my body properly, and those sins in which humanity engages corporately e.g., discrimination by one group of people against another on grounds of race, gender, religion etc.

Knowledge also impacts what is viewed as sinful. What was sinful decades ago, might no longer be so as our understanding of what it means to be human has evolved. Same-sex relationships, once viewed as being so sinful that they were criminalised, are now understood to be a normal and healthy part of society. Similarly, new 'sins' emerge. So much of the way in which humanity has failed to properly steward the earth's resources, denuding the habitat on which the biodiversity of our planet home is dependent, means a whole new list of sins has been brought into the frame. The writer of Genesis delights in the story that out of nothing God creates something - the wonders of the universe. In our own day, we now face the very real prospect of turning that something back into nothing – returning the earth into a 'formless and empty, darkness...'

The need for a season of Lent, a time to reflect and reform our way of life, to hold ourselves to account before God and each other, is, it seems, needed now as much as ever.

God Bless.

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