



"BEHOLD, I BRING YOU GOOD

tidings

of great joy"

St. Luke's Anglican Church, Amherst, NH

The Reverend Richard L. B. Sutter, Rector

ancient worship...
...timeless faith

Lent 2005

From the Rector

Dear People of God:

Lent sneaked up on us again! "I hate Lent!" someone will invariably say. Perhaps you yourself have said it. Now, most of us have since childhood cherished a special place in our hearts for Christmas, but the Christ Mass to celebrate the Incarnation of the Redeemer of the world has been overrun by rampant commercialism. For many of us it takes Lent instead to make the mystery of the Incarnation meaningful in our lives.

Lent helps us enter the deepest and most important mysteries of what it truly means to be human—spirit and flesh fused together.

Ash Wednesday is the beginning of Lent. Ashes remind us of our mortality. The ashes which are blessed and traced in the form of a cross on our forehead come from last year's palms, also reminding us that the very praises of Hosanna which we sang turn to dust when we deny Our Lord through sin.

Lent is a time of self denial. Too often, though, it is reduced to "the old Catholic diet". While gluttony is certainly one of the seven deadly sins, Lent was not designed to be merely a weight loss system. Traditional Anglicans need to understand three things about Lent: fasting, abstinence, and discipline.

Fasting

Fasting is *not* refraining from all food. Fasting is eating no more than a light breakfast, one

full meal (no dessert, of course), and one half meal. In our Super-sized, Biggie-sized, Whopper of a society this may feel tough, but it is more than enough to get by on. Learning to eat less, healthier, and simply is not only good for our bodies, but also for our souls. Most of us have at one time or another felt like we were shot with a tranquilizer dart after pulling away from a McDonald's. By avoiding overeating as well as foods that make us groggy we can better say our prayers with attention and devotion.

Abstinence

Simply put, abstinence is abstaining from flesh meat. "Flesh meat" here *does* include chicken, by the way, I'm sad to say for those of us who are not overly fond of fish. In other words, Lent may not be the best of times to start the Atkins or South Beach diets!

When and How?

It comes as a surprise to many people to hear that our Book of Common Prayer *requires* fasting *with* abstinence for all forty days of Lent as well as every Friday of the year outside Christmastide! The current Catholic rule, on the other hand, is to fast and abstain only on Fridays during Lent, a light requirement indeed. A healthy balance between the two would be to fast the forty days and fast with abstinence on Fridays—or one might want to abstain the forty days and fast with abstinence on Fridays. But pick one and stick with it. A rule that changes with our appetites is no rule at all!

Over-fasting to the point of endangering your health defeats the purpose of the spiritual exercise. The very young, the very old, and those under the care of a physician customarily are not expected to fast. When in doubt one should always consult one's priest.

During Lent we find how much we pamper ourselves during the year. While the material world is a gift from God and should never be shunned as evil, we often find too much of our purpose and pleasure in the things themselves without giving proper thanksgiving for them or by using them contrary to or in excess of that for which they were created. Lent is a time to examine our true motives and impulses.

Discipline

We often hear about “giving something up” for Lent. This is not the time to be frivolous and give up something about which we care little, but rather to give up some lawful pleasure such as chocolate, scotch, television (although one may well wonder whether any television these days is a lawful plea-

sure.) Giving up something is not the sole extent of Lenten discipline, however. Our discipline ought to be a fine tuning of our individual Rules of Life: our personal prayer, corporate prayer, devotion, spiritual reading and study, and the corporal acts of mercy. That doesn't mean that “giving up” is bad; on the contrary, we probably ought to give up much more than we do!

Skeptics and other modernists love to talk about “taking something on” instead of giving up something, but in reality, one ought to do both. Fill the gap of giving up with prayer, visiting the sick, giving to the poor, attending Christian education, shopping for or driving a shut-in. Take something on for Christ this Lent.

Conclusion

The rules we set for ourselves for Lent should help make us better Christians. Lent should bring us closer to God, each other, and His creation.

Let us all focus on the real work of the Church. On Ash Wednesday let us all vow as a parish family to offer prayers, as well as to reach out to our community that we may become Christ to a hurting world. Our baptism made us members of his Body. We are his ears to listen to the dejected and hopeless; we are his voice which speaks words of kindness. It is time to take up our cross and “offer our selves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice.” Let us journey through the cross to the light!

Affectionately, your rector and friend,

RS4

Letters and Such

I suspect you received a letter from me on February 1st. That letter I had sent to the post office's new online service where you send them a mailing, they print, fold, address, and mail them. Sounded like a great deal, and they promised delivery on 1/26, which they missed by six days! I objected to their failure and in-

sisted on a refund, which they rejected—but I'm pursuing other forms of redress. “Never give up,” as Sir Winston Churchill said!

Anglican Tracts

You may have seen a couple of tracts in the narthex recently. One is about receiving communion, and the other is about becoming a member. These are the first two tracts in a series the rector plans to write, design, and publish. The series, to be called "Holy Cross Tracts," because the Cross is the center of the Faith, will include information for longtime members, newcomers, and visitors, explaining the faith and practice of Anglicanism. If you have a topic you'd like to suggest for these tracts, or a question you think could be expanded into a brief explanation, please have a word with Fr Sutter.

Lenten Program

Our journey through Lent this year will be made more pleasant and more fruitful, we hope, as we share Wednesday evenings together. The program will begin with liturgy at 6:30, proceed with a simple soup and salad supper at 6:45, and finish with a discussion of various topics until 8:00. The liturgy portion of the evening will give us a chance to share the experience of different types of traditional liturgies. Our soup and salad suppers will feature lighter fare appropriate for Lent, so those of us who are fasting or abstaining will be able to continue to do so. And the discussion topics will range from parts of the catechism in the prayerbook to the nature of worship, and Christian liberty. The leader for our Lenten program will be our own Frank Bartlett, who is a postulant for Holy Orders in the Church and will be fulfilling important parts of his practical training in this program. Sign up sheets will be available downstairs in the undercroft for people to sign up to bring soup and salad on individual weeks.

Holy Week 2005 Schedule



Maundy Thursday, March 24th

7:00 pm..... Holy Eucharist

Good Friday, March 25th

12 noon..... Stations of the Cross
7:00 pm..... Liturgy of Good Friday

Saturday, March 26th

7:00 pm..... Paschal Vigil and
First Eucharist of Easter

Subdeacons

Everyone is familiar with the fact that the Church consecrates Bishops, Priests, and Deacons for the good of the Church in her hierarchical organization. What everyone may not know is that there is more to Holy Orders. Subdeacons, originally considered the lowest degree of Major Orders, were a traditional step for postulants for ordination. Some parts of the traditional Anglican Communion have enjoyed the ministry of Subdeacons for years, and the House of Bishops of the ACA has recently commended the restoration of the practice in dioceses that had not yet revived it. Subdeacons in the Anglican Church, however, are not necessarily men in the process toward ordination and may be any layman who feels so called, is suitably prepared, and set apart for that ministry by the bishop. The role of the subdeacon is usually to assist with the chalice and various other ceremonies at the altar.

A Rule of Life

What is a rule of life?

The term comes from monastic origins, but is entirely scriptural. Moses, Elijah, and Jesus all fasted for forty days. Each kept a rule, or discipline, to give them a chance to strengthen their spiritual muscles. A rule of life can also be called a Rule of Prayer. The purpose of developing a rule is not to foster pharisaical self satisfaction but to aid the Christian in his spiritual journey. A Rule is not kept, but rather embraced. If we are going to run any race, including the spiritual race, we must have a healthy diet and regular exercise. Strangely we will form all sorts of rigors for ourselves for other activities, but leave our spiritual life completely unplanned. A rule therefore doesn't bind, but frees the person. Your rule should not be too easy nor impossible to keep. Lent is a good time to start a Rule as the momentum of weekly services and support of the parish community is at its highest.

How to develop your rule.

One of the key elements to developing a healthy rule is to have a spiritual director. This could be a Priest of your church, a monastic, or perhaps a wise person approved by your Priest who has had more experience in spiritual matters than you. They must be knowledgeable about Christian theology and prayer. There is no one correct way of prayer, but there are many incorrect ones. If your understandings of prayer and matters of faith are incorrect, so will your prayer life be. You should meet with your director to talk about the progress of your prayer life at least once a month. You should also make no changes to your Rule of Life without consulting your director. The mentorship of a wise Christian can help you avoid overzealous behavior, or other obstacles to a deeper prayer life.

The following areas should be considered.

1. Have you been baptized with water in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

Baptism began our Lord's active ministry and we are to follow in his footsteps. If you have not, you should seek out the priest in your parish to seek proper instruction that leads toward this Sacrament. It is in Baptism that we are spiritually regenerated and adopted by God. It is only the baptized Christian who has a valid claim to address God as "Our Father".

2. Attendance at Holy Communion.

This is essential to a Christian's prayer life. It is the heartbeat of Anglican-Catholic Christianity. Jesus said "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood you have no life in you." This saying shocked and bewildered many. "How can he do this?" replied many. The disciples finally understood Him when he picked up the bread and wine and said, "This is my Body; this is my Blood." We continually remember Our Lord's sacrifice until his coming again in this act which, from the beginning, was the most important act of prayer in the Christian Church. If this is not a regular part of your spirituality at this time, you will find in this act a great source of God's Grace and nourishment for your soul. It is mandatory on all Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation.

3. Regular daily prayer.

Grace is not magic but is activated by prayer, real honest heart-to-heart communication with God. Five minutes twice a day of real prayer is more valuable than three hours of reciting the Psalms while dozing.

You should have some "formalized" set of prayers for Morning, perhaps Noon, and at the Evening. This could be the Office of Morning and Evening Prayer from the Prayer Book. This type of prayer is often referred to as vocal prayer, and should be said aloud, even if you are alone. During Lent you could start simple: reading the Sunday Epistle for morning and the Sunday Gospel for evening with the Ash Wednesday penitential Psalm 51 recited. This can be followed up with the Apostles Creed and The Lord's Prayer. Your own personal prayers can follow. This type of short recited service is like daily push-ups. You may not seem to get much out of it some days, but like daily push-ups you do get stronger! This should be in addition to or along with private talking with God in your own words. Formal prayer often opens up our hearts to personal prayer when we either do not feel like it (which is irrelevant, for we must pray for our soul's health as we must eat food to sustain our body) or when we are in a difficult time and do not know what to pray.

Full ACTS of prayer contain the following:

Adoration: the praise of God for who he is. The Psalms or Hymns of the Church can provide a good source for these prayers.

Contrition: This is sorrow for your sins. An in-depth examination of all the sins you can remember with a confession of them by name should be done daily at the end of the day. It is often customary to do a shorter examination at Noontime.

Thanksgiving: After we make an act of Contrition at the foot of the Cross of Jesus, we can not help but be thankful. This is where the Christian always starts. This thankfulness should extend from the most heavenly things (Christ's Birth, Death and Resurrection, Ascension, etc.) to the most common things which are also a gift from God (beautiful weather, your best friend's company, the joy of your favorite food, etc.).

Supplication: This is prayer for yourself and others. Christians are a priestly people. We sacrifice our time and offer prayers for all mankind.

Other practices you might consider are:

Your frequency of Sacramental Confession. The regular practice of Meditation on Scripture, or an event of Our Lord's life, or meditate in front of an

icon. An annual spiritual retreat. A quiet day where you spend a half day or more in silent reflection. Spiritual reading other than the Bible (there are many spiritual classics or modern books). Regular service in the church (serving at the Altar, or working on the Altar Guild). Tithing a regular amount of your money in support of the work of the Church. A spiritual journal (not a daily diary) in which you track your difficulties or growth in prayer. This can be used as you talk with your spiritual director. It is nice to look back and be able to see how God directed you through a difficult time or to find help so that you avoid the same mistakes you made before. Lastly, is a *Villa Day*. This is taking time to "just be" away from work, studies, etc. This can be a camping trip, taking a novel to the beach in summertime, curling up by a fire, or a day of skiing. Because it does not seem obviously "spiritual," like praying Morning and Evening Prayer, this is often the first thing people excuse themselves from. However, we can not serve God if we are burnt out mentally, physically, or spiritually.

How you work out your Rule this Lent is in itself a matter of prayer and is between you, God, and your spiritual director.

*Fr William Sisterman,
Rector of St Dunstan's, Minneapolis*

