



Anglican Catholic Church



Diocese of the United Kingdom

Catholic Faith † Orthodox Worship † Apostolic Order

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My dear friends and colleagues,

On Wednesday 1st March Lent begins. The Prayer Book describes Lent as forty days “of fasting and abstinence”, and abstinence is certainly the keynote of it. But it is also a season of penitence – a fact which is sometimes overlooked – and in these times, when abstinence is often enforced by social deprivation anyway, we can perhaps give better prominence in our minds to Lent’s other aspects. Lent stands for repentance as much as for self-denial: and of the two, the first is certainly the more difficult, because a spiritual effort always demands more of us than a physical one. It is much harder to repent than to fast if, by repent, we mean real, serious and definite repentance. Repentance means a change of mind, and we must all be aware that if we find it hard to give up smoking, for example, or control our appetite, then to change our ways about sins, give up a definite evil habit, or make reparation for some wrong we have done, is much harder. We are all familiar with the people who announce that they are going to give up sugar in their tea this Lent, when everyone knows that it would be much better for them if they gave up a bit of their selfishness at home, or thoughtlessness for those around them, as the case may be.



It is the thing that really matters that should be tackled, and it will require from us sincerity, courage and determination. It is not enough to see what is wrong; we must do something about it.

But Lent is not the only time when self-discipline is demanded of us. To regard it as a period of self-restraint lasting forty days, and then, thank goodness, it is over and done with, is to mistake its meaning completely. Rather it is a symbol of, and witness to, a need which is always present – the necessity of self-control.

And something which all good, thinking people, whether Christian or not, can agree upon is this: namely, that without self-discipline of some kind, human character cannot reach its highest level. And for us, as Christians, self-discipline must be undertaken for the very good reason that we may better fit ourselves to serve God. To find that we have lost the power to say “No” to ourselves, and to find that we have become the slaves of our desires is one of the most humiliating things which can happen to us.

If you are not sure what there is in you that should be disciplined or denied, or for which you need repentance; ask your family or your friends – they will tell you!

With every blessing for an illuminating and enriching Lent

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Anyone for Pancakes?

Can eating pancakes enrich Christian piety? As a part of the traditional celebration of Shrove Tuesday, maybe they *can* build our faith.

Shrove Tuesday (this year 28th February) is essentially the British version of Mardi Gras or Carnival. But instead of flamboyant parties filled with riotous excess, the understated British gather calmly round their frying pans on the day before Lent to solemnly prepare pancakes.

Why pancakes? In medieval Europe, Christians often gave up eating rich foods like meat, eggs, and milk for the 40-day period of penance, prayer, and preparation leading to Easter. The practice and duration of the ritual corresponded to Christ's 40 days of fasting in the desert.

During Lent perishable goods would spoil, so pancakes – traditionally just eggs and milk mixed with flour – were the ideal meal for consuming foods proscribed in Lent.

But Shrove Tuesday wasn't just about cleaning out the kitchen cupboards. It was also about cleaning out the heart. Shrove is the past tense of shrive, which means to confess sins and to have sins absolved. Priests would ring shriving bells to call pancake-laden parishioners to church to confess their sins (perhaps starting with their gluttony!).

During the Reformation, many Protestants, especially our Puritan ancestors, dismissed Lent and Shrove Tuesday as superstitious Catholic observances aimed at earning God's favour through human works. Thus, strict Lenten observance declined among English-speaking people. But the palate proved mightier than the Puritans. Most Britons didn't want to give up pancakes – even if, without an austere Lent, there wasn't any real reason to use up all the eggs and milk. Eating pancakes was reason enough for a party. To this day, people all over Britain and in scattered British communities worldwide, eat pancakes on Shrove Tuesday.

But with the underlying religious motivation largely gone, the occasion is now more commonly known as Pancake Day. And what a pity. Without the "Shrove" in Shrove Tuesday, it's just another Tuesday, but with more calories.

Reducing Shrove Tuesday to Pancake Day is a bit like calling Easter "Chocolate Egg Day". Pancakes and chocolate eggs are to many people delicious (though probably not together) but eating them loses spiritual and cultural meaning without the shriving of sins and the joy in the Resurrection of the Saviour. Christians at least ought to recover the Christian underpinnings of Shrove Tuesday, as part of the Lenten preparation for Easter.

Lent is to Easter what Advent is to Christmas, and helps us appreciate that Easter is theologically more significant than Christmas – even if contemporary Western culture gets it back to front.

Christians don't worship a baby who stayed in a manger. We worship a Saviour who died for us and rose again that we might, through him, have victory over sin and death. He is risen, so we can be shriven. The season of Lent focuses our hearts and minds on this wonderful truth.

And it all begins with pancakes. The quaint and seemingly anachronistic feast of Shrove Tuesday helps us in our transition from the everyday world to a time of preparation for the most important day in the Christian calendar – which also happens to be the most important day in human history.

