

## Looking back and moving on.....

At the end of January, I faced one of those pivotal moments in life - turning fifty. This has been a milestone that has loomed large for much of the last couple of years. The same happened when I turned forty. I had liked being in my thirties. For me, being in that decade meant being young, energetic, still having ahead of me a life full of infinite possibilities, whereas being in one's forties meant being middle-aged, getting older, and not having as many choices or as much fun!

The thirties were a good decade for me in which a lot happened - I began to train for the ministry, I was married, I was ordained, I served my curacy and then became Team Vicar in Ashton. And yet time marched on, the inevitable happened and I turned forty. And I survived!

My forties were a good decade on the whole – apart from the sadness of the death of my father. I became the owner of a beautiful cat and an Aunt; I finished my ministry in Ashton and became Priest-in-Charge here at St Martin's as well as being Young Adults Missioner. I think that it has been a decade in which I have felt more settled and established in who I am as a person and as a priest. I have grown in confidence and discovered that my increasing experience of ministry has been valued across the diocese as I have been invited on to a variety of different diocesan groups and to take part in a range of activities locally and abroad. All of these experiences have been exciting and my fears on entering my forties were unfounded.

But here I am again, contemplating a new decade. In some ways, it shouldn't really matter, after all it's only another year, another day even. But there does seem to be a subtle difference in that this birthday has a tinge of sadness attached to it as I look to the future. More than at other birthdays, I have been acutely aware that time is passing by ever more quickly. It took me aback when I realised that SAGA now caters for my needs (those of the over 50s) – I'd always associated them with people much older than myself!

At forty, I was still half the age that most of my grandparents were when they died, but the reality is that now I have most likely lived more than half of my lifespan. This isn't meant to sound morbid, but as I enter my fifties, I have a greater sense than before that time needs to be valued, that time is too precious to be wasted. However, I was heartened to read this quote from Emma Soames, the editor-at-large of *Saga* magazine: "We are welcoming an era in which 50 is the new 34. The increasingly glamorous image of 50-year-olds has even spawned a new term, the "Quintastics" – thanks, in part, to the visibility of a number of high-profile celebrities who met the event with undiminished glamour, including Bono, Nigella Lawson, Hugh Grant, Jonathan Ross, Colin Firth, Tilda Swinton and Kristin Scott Thomas."

For me, turning fifty has a "bitter-sweet" aspect to it. There is the joy of realising that this new decade offers plenty of opportunities to enjoy still but there is also sadness at the

reminder of my own mortality and that knowledge that life can pass by very quickly.

This month, the church celebrates one of the pivotal moments in its annual cycle. The festival of Candlemas takes place on February 2<sup>nd</sup>, forty days after Christmas. This, too, is an event with a “bitter-sweet” nature. It is a feast day in which we rejoice in the revelation of Jesus in the Temple and his greeting by Simeon and Anna. However, the prophetic words of Simeon which speak of the falling and rising of many and the sword that will pierce (Luke 2.22-35) remind us of sad times ahead.

Up to Candlemas, we are in a period of celebration in church. Christmas and Epiphany have seen us decked with festal white and gold and the Sundays have been “...of Epiphany”. After Candlemas the colour changes to green and the Sundays become “...before Lent”. It is as if we say in the Candlemas service,

*“one last look back to Christmas, and now, turn towards the cross”!*

We leave behind the joyful celebrations and move forward into a time of conflicting emotions. There is sadness that Jesus suffers and dies on the cross but also joy that Jesus overcomes death and that the hope and new life of the Resurrection is made available to us.

Just as the “bitter-sweetness” of turning fifty has motivated me to embrace life even more fully than before, may this festival of Candlemas help you to embrace your life of faith more fully. As you turn your back on the festivities of Christmas and Epiphany, and look to Lent and Easter, may you be filled with hope, peace and joy.

*Jo*