

Doing Lent

What are you doing this Lent?

We may find ourselves being asked this question as we enter the season of Lent on 1st March. Lent is traditionally a season of preparation for Holy Week and Easter, a time of reflecting on our spiritual health, a period of being penitent. But sometimes I wonder whether I fall into the trap of doing too much in Lent – trying to give something up, reading a religious book, leading a Lent Course and holding special services. Maybe a Lenten challenge for me, and perhaps you, would be to focus more on simply “being”. It would be nice if lots of people in the parish got involved in the different things on offer for you to do during Lent (see advert elsewhere in this magazine for articles)! However, I think it’s important that we mark this season by making space for God, looking at where Jesus is leading us, allowing the Holy Spirit to change our hearts and minds.

One morning, Roger and I were reading a reflection as part of saying Morning Prayer together and at the end we both commented how good it was. To me it presents a good reminder that if only we took more time to look around us, we would see God at work in many, many ways. The writer focused on prayer and at the end of one day he wrote these words:

“I’m standing at night in a basement room, a subterranean place of prayer, and perhaps it’s the coffee, or the music, or the Spirit, but the darkness doesn’t seem too strong. I’m praying for miracles in the city where I live — for healings, and salvations, and justice, and revival, and all those usual kingdom kind of things. But tonight, as I do so, I find myself suddenly startled like a boy blinking at fireworks - bewildered by how many miracles there already are.

It occurs to me that here in my city today, doctors dispensed healing - can you imagine anything more wonderful? Neighbours did favours. Dog-walkers in the park silently admired the shape of trees. Jokes were told in nursing homes. For a moment or two, thousands and thousands of people prayed, or wished, or merely unwittingly wanted what God wanted.

Chances are that somewhere today a young man and a young woman began to fall in love (although they don’t yet know it). A teenager picked up trash she had not dropped. A single mother decided, just for once, to buy herself a slice of chocolate cake and to celebrate the moment in long, slow, mouthfuls of happiness. A painter-decorator stepped back from a wall he’d just painted the colour of claret, and maybe at that moment the sunlight broke through the window, and he saw that it was a good piece of work. A man resisted the temptation to click the link he wouldn’t want his wife to see. Maybe he failed yesterday. Maybe he’ll click it tomorrow. But today he overcame. In the hospital, perhaps a surgeon pinned a broken arm with immaculate skill. Delicious food was prepared and cooked and served in thousands of homes joyously. A pastor’s words, so carefully crafted, brought a little comfort to grieving relatives. People cried, but a check-out girl smiled at a lonely old lady. People died, of course, but babies were also born. From time to time today, I was born too. We all were. A million, minor miracles.

We do not pray ex nihilo. We pray for more of whatever it is we see. Nothing comes from nothing - certainly not faith like this. Tonight, I am aware of the evidence of miracles; the pre-

existing goodness, the presence of Christ in these streets, these surgeries, these schools, these art galleries, these pubs, these homes, these hospital wards. Witnessing so many minor miracles, I applaud the world. If all of this is happening all around me, what might not happen next?

And so I stand here now in this subterranean place of prayer and it seems self-evident that there is more light in the night than darkness in the day. There is goodness breaking through, everywhere I look.

Ultimately, almost inevitably, benevolence wins the day quietly.

I'm climbing the stairs to my car now, stepping out of the prayer room into the darkness. I'm driving home past houses and perhaps it's the music on the stereo, or the coffee, or the Spirit, but the city seems to me to have become the place of prayer."

I wonder how much more our relationship with God would grow if we were aware of the daily miracles he performs? Perhaps this Lent, you might like to commit yourself to spending time in the presence of God, looking out for miracles, and turning to him in thanks and praise for the wonders he is doing all around you.

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