

All Saints Alive

VICAR'S VIEWPOINT



Lent

Dear Friends,

Lent tends to be associated in many people's minds with giving up chocolate, which I admit can be something of a challenge for some of us, but even so it can be a rather moderate way of "observing" Lent. It doesn't come even vaguely close to Jesus' fasting in the wilderness to spend time with His Father and re-define his commitment and purpose of giving his life for us.

On the other hand, a Report was published near Ash Wednesday which suggested that British people's diets include over 50% ultra-processed food which – due to its additives and manufacture – can increase the risk of cancer and other illnesses. Among those foods I noted – yes – chocolate. Chocolate is refined and processed, and, of course, it is delicious, which is why all the ultra-processed foods are full of sugar and salt, and other additives.

Food technology is big business, and it seems that we love it. But come Easter, it is healthier in every way to come and worship the Risen Christ in church than to sit at home consuming easter eggs!

The Report lists many other foods, many of them may be among our favourites, such as pizza, sliced bread, meat products/ready meals and crisps. It is the fact that they are ultra-processed which makes them unhealthy, and it is the high proportion of these foods in our diets which makes them so questionable. Using fresh ingredients (fruit, vegetables, fish, meat, etc) is much better for us. Yet when you walk around a supermarket well over half of the racks and fridges are given to ready-made and ultra-processed food.

The Lenten Fast could involve a deliberate moving away from an unhealthy diet to a healthier one. On a particularly spiritual note, the questions about food shadow our personal ideas about faith.

The world around us will inevitably influence us in many ways, but there is so much that can draw us away from trusting and loving God. And it can happen in a manner which we scarcely notice. Just as vast amounts of unhealthy food on sale normalises it for buying and eating, so the atmosphere of marginalising faith or highlighting particular negative faith-related events (which none of us approves of) can erode our beliefs.

When we are told in the media that we live in an increasingly secularised society, it is not that it is untrue, but that we may personally feel influenced to become more secularised – so we find other things to do, and imagine that no-one believes that stuff any more

But actually, we do. Jesus went into the wilderness to "simply be", and to face the temptations of doing things the world's way rather than God's way. He preached a Gospel of love, of God's love for everyone and the need to love others. When he was rejected he did not take the world's way of violence and hatred, but sacrificed himself. He took the full force of humanity's sinful nature to the cross. He saw through this world's ways and lived and died to show the completeness of God's love. And his obedience and sacrifice led to his being raised by God to new life, which we celebrate and embrace after we have followed day by day, week by week, the Passion of Jesus who witnessed to the truth in this troubled and uncertain world.

The challenge of Lent is to not be taken in by the world's ways of self-indulgence and scepticism. Easy and pleasant lifestyle availability should not blind us to the need for faith in a world which can destroy our body and soul. We are vulnerable, mortal beings and sometimes our lives and our world can become out of control, and today as always, we need the love and peace of God.

Love, Jo

The Beatles

If someone had told me in 1964 that one day there would be a Sir Paul McCartney I would have thought them crazy, although a year later all four Beatles received an MBE. Now there is Sir Richard Starkey (Ringo Starr) from the New Year's Honours. That would have seemed even more unlikely, but it is so, for services to music and charity. Frankly, though, it's wonderful to an old Beatles fan like me.

This is why we had a triple tribute at the January Jolly, with Geoff and Thomas Oates and I (the Fab Three?) singing three Beatles songs – naturally beginning with Yesterday, which Sir Richard did not feature on at all, before moving on to two which he definitely powered along. Well done Ringo. And well done Tom, who sang so movingly.

Soundbites on 7 February featured the organist Paul Ayres, who played a brilliant concert including his own compositions based on Beatles songs. He said that he is also a big fan, and had begun with All You Need Is Love, adapted for a wedding, and he has now moved on to other pieces. The most striking was the way in which J.S.Bach's 'Trio on Ich steh' mit einem Fuss im Grahe' moved imperceptibly into 'Hey Jude'. His CD Rainbow Toccatas is available on Priory records (and also on streaming). Jo and I were wondering prior to the concert which tracks Paul would play, and it seems we will need to wait a while until 'I am the Walrus' joins the repertoire. Mind you, the key and tempo changes must have been difficult for Ringo to keep up with too....

Doug Loveridge



Join other pilgrims from across St Albans Diocese to celebrate the risen Christ on Easter Monday at St Albans Cathedral.

Now in its eighth decade, the annual Pilgrimage and service have become a family event which now includes grandparents, parents, young children (in pushchairs), babies (in prams), the family dog (on a lead) ... and of course muddy boots! **All are welcome.**

We gather on Easter Monday, 2nd April, in the Abbey Orchard around **1.00pm** for a picnic and games together. We then join the procession into the Cathedral for the Easter Monday Service which begins at **3.00pm**. The service finishes by 4.30pm in plenty of time to walk or drive home.

Track the pilgrims' progress on Twitter #StAlbansEMP and keep up-to-date on www.facebook.com/StAlbansEMP

If anyone is interested in this great spiritual day out please could they let Jo know so we can form a party.