

Thanks to those who were able to spend some time in silence and reflection last Saturday at the Lenten Quiet Day. I find such occasions to be tremendously important in “setting the tone” for the season ahead. It is no coincidence, as I mentioned at the time, that every Lent begins with the account of Jesus in the desert – it is as though each of the Gospel writers (even in their own unique context and situation) all realised the centrality of this event for Jesus, and how it became the formative event from which his ministry flowed. So too, for us, reflecting on this allows us to enter afresh into the season, even if we have been through it many times before.

One of the things I stressed during the day was the link between the desert and the sense of the “devil”, in whatever form it is we imagine this to be. For myself, an awareness of how so many of the temptations I feel come from within me – my own unrealistic expectations of how I should be, my fear of what others might think of me, for example – and how this awareness or acknowledgment is the first step toward healing and wholeness.

In Lenten practice we’re trying to create a desert experience – to put down at least one of our addictions, so that our emptiness is exposed... so the truth, about who we are and where we are, may be uncovered. So for example, we might choose to be more careful with our food or wine intake – not in some sort of twisted punishment, but in order that we notice how much we depend on them for relaxation and comfort... so the hole is revealed.

This is not easy stuff, and it is, in truth, our life’s work as Christians – but this forty days is given to us as a gift (a strange way to look at it, at first glance) by the church, which has understood, through its wisdom, that we need a specific and intentional time to do this as we prepare to enter Holy Week and the desolation of Good Friday.

Last week I was delighted to be invited to speak at the Christ Church Grammar School Chapel service. The occasion was the World Day of Prayer, with a special focus on the Philippines, and those in need in that place. There had been a special collection at the school for this, and over \$400 had been raised for it. I had been asked to focus on how we, along with the school and the parish of CCSY, care for those in need in our local area, through the Emergency Food Relief (EFR) ministry.

I shared with the children just a couple of brief “case studies”, of the sort of people who use our food relief service, and pointed out that as much as the food, it was also the human contact that was important for some people, who may be incredibly isolated in their everyday lives. The talk was well received, and I hope the school community will continue to be generous in their support of EFR.

May St. Patrick, Cyril of Jerusalem, and all the Saints walk with you this Lent...

Sam