

Lent 2008

Dear Members and Friends,

Shrove Tuesday occurs on 5 February this year and Lent begins the next day with Ash Wednesday. This is the earliest these dates appear on the calendar and there could well be snow at Easter on 23 March. I tell you this because these dates have a way of sneaking up on us, and they are already almost here.

As a Lenten reflection I want to suggest the subject of participation in the life of the Church, and specifically the Holy Eucharist on Sundays and Feast Days. I hope that everyone knows that participation in the life of the Church is a promise made at Holy Baptism, affirmed in Holy Confirmation, and renewed in Holy Communion. But beyond this legalistic thinking, why should we participate much in the general life and workings of the Church? Why should we come to make our Holy Communion each Sunday?

The answers lie in our personal responsibility for our own welfare. We are responsible for ourselves in terms of diet, exercise, personal relationships, and life in general. Our religion is what binds all of this responsibility into one integrated picture. In fact, the word 'religion' comes from the Latin word meaning "to re-bind together." Our religion re-binds all the disparate elements of our lives into an integrated way of seeing ourselves, our God, our world, and how we relate to and in it all.

This integration is not something done "once upon a time" in our childhood. It is a continuous and evolutionary process, as we grow in knowledge, experience, wisdom, and maturity. The re-binding of our world is on-going with every new bit of scientific discovery which lets us live longer, or threatens to annihilate us, each new life-altering experience which turns us upside down or gives us a new lease on life. Out of our religion comes our understanding and ability, like the Samaritan, to help others re-bind their lives by meeting immediate and basic needs of whatever sort, bandaging and binding for restoration.

The Christian community which is our Church gives us a place- I would say, *the* place- to re-bind our lives, to test the limits, to wrestle with God, and to learn the background story which binds and makes developing sense of our experience in the world. The Church finds its deepest meaning and explanation in the Holy Eucharist. There the reality of the world is starkly presented as we recall the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and the reasons for it. The lessons and insights of the past are brought out like keys to unlock possibilities for our present. The nature of love, forgiveness, and reconciliation are distributed in bread and wine become Body and Blood. In an essential act of faith we offer ourselves as a living sacrifice to God's unknown purposes for us and others. Rich stuff all that. Not something to be taken lightly or shied away from, but the "stuff" of life and what it means to "participate" in the life of the Church.

As we walk the path of Lent, think on these things. Use the Church to pull yourself together, and to give yourself away- a living sacrifice. And come with joy to meet your Lord where you may surely find Him.

Faithfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jesse L. A. Parker". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

(The Rev'd) Jesse L. A. Parker
Rector