

A Reflection from a St Mary's Churchwarden (Charles Wilson)

Lent! Meaning "lengthen". So the days are getting longer. Good! I sometimes calculate how much more daylight we have each week during January, to encourage myself. However, by mid-February I'm no longer worried, as by then we have another 2 hours of daylight from 1st January. There seems to be plenty - unless you play cricket, of course.

Lent didn't start too well for me. Ash Wednesday and Valentine's Day clashed for the first time since 1945. As the Washington Post pointed out "the faithful abstain from pleasures to remember that we are all dust, destined to die" and "the lovestruck indulge in steak dinners and champagne to keep their love alive". Apparently that gives its readers a conflict, and only now do I understand why.

I knew that Julia and I couldn't have our usual Valentine's dinner together, as we wanted to attend the Ash Wednesday evening service led by Rev Alan Mathers. I mentally thought we'd have a proper dinner the following day, completely forgetting that moving our dinner date doesn't actually move Valentine's day itself. So for the first time since 1945 - well 1970, anyway - I forgot.... to get my beloved a CARD even. Not good. Not good at all.

It got worse. She had specially bought some duck for us to share, after the evening communion, and (for the first time ever) had lashed out on a surprise bottle of Moët & Chandon champagne. If you know Julia, you'll guess this is only a Centennial occurrence. It was delicious. I felt very forgiven; until she said "If I'd known you wouldn't even buy me a card, I'm not sure I'd have bought that champagne two weeks ago". Truthful observation, that.

Many people give up things in Lent, for its 40 days leading to Easter, to identify personally with the 40 days that Jesus spent in the desert at the start of his earthly ministry, fasting and praying. Giving things up certainly has benefit to us. But I often think we should 'take something up' as well, or in lieu. I wonder if Jesus was thinking of his personal deprivation whilst communing with his Father in the desert? Possibly, but more importantly I suspect, he was extremely determined to have intimate communion with his heavenly Father before his earthly ministry started. He had to drop things, food in particular, in order to sharpen his soul and spirit to focus on something much better, and very vital. For him, and for us.

So I'm asking myself – what can I "give up" in Lent that will free me to do something else worthwhile instead? (It clearly cannot be champagne, that opportunity has gone!) Maybe I'll just make a daily confession to my wife of something I've done wrong, each day, to keep a sober view of my own competences. As James says in his short New Testament letter "Confess your faults to one another, and pray, so that you may be healed".

Amen!