

One More Time

This Wednesday the Church calls us to enter the discipline of Lent once more. I was, I believe, born in Lent, so it's not a bad time for me to mark. But I still have to take great care that I do not let this time become a matter of routine; if it does, it will lose its value, and so in a sense will I.

The Value Of The Time

Some people believe that today (whatever today may be) is the most important of all days. You can see the point; but days don't just draw their value from *you*. They bear significance for everyone who is alive; and all the other meanings of the day we're living in can be of importance to me. Those who dance along the pavement with a happy child breathe the same air as those who gaze from a passing funeral car, and those who sing as they make their way to the airport tread the same earth as those who are rushed to the hospital. To be aware of the meaning of any time, we have in some sense to hold in the heart everything that is happening to all of them, as God does. Many people don't believe that there is a meaning -to the whole of life, or even to their own little share in it. I think that we must not only believe both those things, but seek to know them. And Lent is a time to do this.

A Deeper Life

The life that is trivial and shallow is often so because it is restricted to the selfish concerns of the one who lives it. We run a special risk of this sad state because our culture has decided that one's own life is the only source of meaning. *What matters* is largely understood as *what matters to me*; and people can be heard vociferously discussing what matters to them. Education becomes a very limited idea in those terms, resting as it does on the notion of a self-determined, self-made life. It is little wonder that community is so hard to build in such a world: if everyone sets his own scale of what matters, there is nothing left that matters to everyone, and if we have no interest in common, then of course we can have no community. What a mean and lonely fate that would be! When St Paul prayed for the Ephesians, he prayed that they would *grow firm in power in their inner selves, would be planted on love and built on*

love, would grow great enough to grasp the breadth and length, the height and depth, until knowing the love of Christ which is beyond knowledge, they would be filled with the utter fullness of God. Now there's real notion of education! You can see how he wants his converts to burst out of their restricted, selfish life, and to be newly-founded on a transformed scale, which would open them to the divine dimensions and relationships which are too great for human aspirations.

Ash Wednesday Once More

So we turn once more from our shop-soiled past, with its selfishness and its worldly limitations, and contemplate once again the destiny held out to us by God. To live as his children is quite different from living as worldlings. This is no trimming of the boats, it is not a mild adjustment that we contemplate. It is nothing less than a going into the tomb with Jesus, who came to his own and found rejection, because they did not think themselves worthy to become children of God. It is from the death of our selfish schemes that the new humanity can be born, raised in the power of the Lord from the ashes of the world.

Sacrifice

The Lenten Masses are an indispensable place for us to follow Christ throughout Lent. But we can pray anywhere, to put off the selfish blinkers which limit "the truth" to what concerns only us. This year we have every reason to open our hearts to the suffering of the world, and to do what we can to heal it and reconcile it to the God who called it into being. *Fr Philip*