

“The secret and hidden wisdom of God.”

1 Cor 2:7

On Wednesday we shall begin the forty-day fast of Lent. On the internet, there will be plenty of Catholic blogs encouraging us to give up something or to do something extra. Yet even in the secular world, the idea of giving something up for Lent is familiar. As Catholics, we are called to make three resolutions, one for each of the three disciplines of Lent, prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

We are asked to deepen our prayer life, especially with regard to penitence for our sins. Any prayers and devotions are good which encourage a deeper awareness of our sins and of our sinful inclinations and habitual temptations. In Lent, making the Stations of the Cross is particularly to be encouraged, and here, at St Pancras, we make the Stations every Friday after the 10am Mass and on Sunday afternoons also. Our little booklets of Lenten devotions provide many other such prayers as well.

We are called to fast. Whilst it is indeed good to give up all sorts of pastimes which we indulge in throughout the rest of the year, fasting means, very specifically, denying the body some of our usual foodstuffs, especially luxuries or treats. To fast means to eat less.

And we are called to give alms, that is, to give to those more in need than ourselves. Often this takes the form of giving money to a chosen charity.

Prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Each of these three disciplines of Lent are designed to help us to say ‘No’ to self and ‘Yes’ to God. In a world where we can have almost anything we want at the click of a button, and where we are continually encouraged to treat ourselves – until, in fact, there is almost no such thing as a treat – we have mostly fallen out of the habit of saying ‘No’ to self, but this is what Lent is largely all about. Lent is not

just about giving something up for forty days, but about trying to change some of our self-indulgent habits permanently. In other words, Lent is about learning to shift our focus from self to God. Lent is about learning to see God as the centre of our world instead of seeing ourselves as the centre of our world. And after Lent is ended, to go on seeing God as the centre of our world.

Throughout Lent, by meditating on the Passion of Christ and by meditating on the reasons why Christ had to suffer and die, we can begin to gain access to ‘the secret and hidden wisdom of God’ as St Paul calls it in today’s Second Reading. If we would know the God who created us in the first place, gaze upon the crucifix. If we would know why Our Lord gave up His life for us, gaze upon the crucifix. If we would know God’s plan for us, gaze upon the crucifix. If we would know why things are as they are, gaze upon the crucifix.

The saints tell us that the crucifix is the school of love. The answer to any question worth asking is to be found on Mount Calvary. Only on the Cross will we find the answers to those issues in life that puzzle us most.

Like any book worth reading and re-reading, the crucifix is worth visiting and re-visiting, again and again and again. Like any masterpiece of artwork, we are rewarded by keeping still and simply looking. It may take time. It *will* take time. The answers are not likely to jump off the Cross all at once and to be immediately clear and obvious. To find the answers we are looking for, we need to be patient, and we need to engage actively – through prayerful stillness, meditation, and contemplation – with what we see before our eyes.

Most of us are no longer used to sitting still. We soon become agitated and restless; we need to be doing something; and we need to tap and swipe the screen with our fingers. But Lent is a time to begin to learn to slow down and to allow our eyes to rest on the sight of the One who died for us.

It's up to you. You can choose to let another Lent slip by with barely a nod in acknowledgement. Or you can choose to engage with the graces and blessings that God reserves for this particular time of year. You can choose – if you wish – to learn from the greatest school of all, to read the most profound book ever written, to gaze upon the most beautiful picture ever painted, and contemplate the crucifixion of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Or you could choose not to.