

2020-1ST LENT

Sometimes people ask me what they must do to pass their Faith on to their children.

The best answer I can give is: Witness to your Faith in such a radical way that your children will never forget that your Faith was precious to you.

I remember how seriously my own mother took Lent. Back in the early 50's, Hamilton was a very foggy place. To the best of my knowledge- it still is! However every morning during Lent, Mum would go out into the dark, fetch her bike and head off in the fog to attend the early morning Mass at St Pius. There was never any expectation that we kids should come with her. Mum didn't have to lecture us about doing something special for Lent. Her witness said everything that could be said.

Mum must have been tempted in all sorts of ways to just stay in bed: it was often freezing cold, it was dangerous biking in the fog, and she inevitably had a big day ahead of her in the Office at St. John's College... a little extra sleep would be all to the good. But she was strong and ignored every temptation.

A temptation is a test of our loyalty to God. It presents us with a basic choice: To do our own thing or to do what we know God wants us to do.

Mum sensed that God was calling her to attend weekday Mass during Lent. For her, staying in bed would have been an act of disloyalty.

Adam was specifically commanded by God not to eat the fruit of a certain tree in the Garden of Eden. Satan tempted him to disobey. His disobedience was an action of radical infidelity and blew to bits the trusting relationship there had been between God and himself.

Jesus knew Himself to be the New Adam; called by the Father to reverse the dislocation wrought by Adam's disloyalty. From the outset of His public ministry Jesus had to establish His mastery over Satan and temptation. There could be no question of Jesus, the New Adam, ever succumbing to temptation.

And so, immediately after His Baptism, Jesus- the New Adam- deliberately went into the desert- the place all Jews believed to be the home of Satan and his demons. and for forty days confronted the devil and temptation.

For us, Lent is a similar trip into the desert. It is a time when we confront temptation; specifically the temptation to give up on what we have committed ourselves to do during the forty days.

During Lent the Church calls on all of us to fast- which basically boils down to not eating between meals.

And this can be really testing. On Thursday I was having a cup of morning tea with a group of ladies and a big box of chocolates was being passed around. The ladies were determined to finish the box and it got passed to me on three occasions. Politely saying 'No' was my first real test of my 2020 Lenten commitment.

But added to this there should be a discipline which we take on which is special to ourselves. It is for us to choose what that will be. What is tough for one person will be easy for another. But we must make sure that what we do is tough- a genuine test.

It may be coming to Mass every morning. It may be joining a Lenten Reflection Group.

It may be not watching Coronation Street. It may be giving up alcohol or coffee or tea. It may be giving up Facebook. It may be not texting.

But like Jesus, we voluntarily allow ourselves to be tested for forty days.

And be assured that we will be tempted to give up on our resolution. A sneaky, insidious voice will speak into our ears saying: "You've had a hard day. God doesn't mind. Come on-Treat yourself."

Each of us must face down such temptation and carry on doing what we find to be intensely difficult. If we can't or won't do this, we have little hope of winning the battle against sin.

Sin is acting in defiance of what we know God's Will to be for us. When crunch time comes and we are confronted by a truly significant choice of whether to sin or not to sin, we will all experience temptation... that sneaky voice telling us: this is hardly sin at all- it is no big deal- come on- treat yourself just this once. How strong will we be?

Lent trains us to be loyal to God. If we can say 'No' to a steaming cup of flat white- which we just crave for with all of our being- we may well be able to say 'No' to temptations which, if succumbed to, will lead us to spiritual death.

We all need the discipline given to us by a good Lent.

Bring Lent into your home. When parents and grandparents are faithful to their Lenten practices, children and grandchildren notice. It has an impact on them to see their parents and grandparents so committed. My mother's fidelity to her Lenten weekday Mass is something I still remember and is an incentive to me even today to take Lent seriously and to try to make every Lent my best one ever. So let's get serious about being disciples of Jesus and follow Him into the desert for the next 40 days.