

Saint Thomas and Saint Thomas of the Air Church
Sexagesima
February 23, 2025
rmcneely+

... receive not the grace of God in vain . . . as having
nothing and yet possessing all things.

In the Anglo Catholic tradition, we will gather in 10 days to
begin the Lenten season on Ash Wednesday, in a sobering
liturgy;

The priest will place ashes on our foreheads with this
startling reminder of our mortality;

Remember o man, of dust thou art
and to dust thou shall return

We of the Anglo Catholic tradition commit the two cultural
taboos of the modern church in Lent:

we talk about sin
and we talk about death.

The two subjects that the church attendance pundits tell us
will drive people from our pews.

So why do we embark upon this serious
and somber pilgrimage to the Resurrection
when the experts direct us
to pander to the Be Happy liturgy of the mega
churches?

Why do we dare to spend 40 days to consider our mortality
and to take stock of our lives?

Why do we still go through the sacrifice, and the deprivation; for the fast of Lent?

The plain answer is this:

the lesson of the ancients holds true after 2000 years.

When we join the Lenten Fast with millions of Christians,
 when we briefly step outside the world,
 when we set aside, even in a minor way,
 the cares of the world,
 the flesh
 and the devil,
 and most importantly:
 IF WE DO IT RIGHT,
 And we humble ourselves in submission to a Lenten
 discipline
 we take a step closer to God
 closer to eternity.

The First Sunday Lenten collect says it well:

“That our flesh being subdued to the spirit we may
 ever obey thy godly motions in righteousness and true
 holiness”

When the fast subdues

our fleshly, human distractions
 and disquietude;
 our minds and hearts
 can better obey our Lord in true holiness.

Of course the key is in how we go about it.

And that is what I would like to explore with you today.

I was a young teenager when I first met Robert Sherwood Morse. He was the new priest at St Peter's where I had been serving as an acolyte for a number of years. Father Morse was a larger than life figure. Tall and large in stature, he was even larger and taller in spirit.

One of his Lenten sermons has never left me.

He was talking about the Lenten sacrifice

And suggesting what we should think about

Giving up for Lent.

He said we could cut out chocolate and call it a fast

We could not eat deserts and call that a fast.

We could not eat red meat and call that a fast

We could reduce the amount of food we eat

because shedding a few pounds

is something we were thinking of doing anyway

and call that a fast.

(about this point in his sermon, I began to squirm)

He said we could exercise more;

(we've been meaning to do that for some time anyway

and then call that a fast.

We could read that CS Lewis book someone told us was pretty good and call that a fast.

(about this point I'm convinced he could read minds the way my mother seemed to do)

Let me be clear, Father Morse did not condemn any of these Lenten sacrifices.

But he reminded us that a Holy Lent could be more than what we give up.

Anything holy is that which is separated out
or set apart from normal life
and dedicated to God.

So a holy Lent is one that is removed from the world
and dedicated to God.

He said giving something up
leaves a void or a hole in your life.
A space of time or a spot where something was.

He suggested that the fast could be filling in that space.
The expression I want you to know is:

“Fill in your fast”.

Where you have given something up for Lent,
and there is a space or a hole
—fill in the fast.

Keep that concept in mind for a moment-fill in the fast.

Fill in what you give up

with something holy;;

something set apart and dedicated to God.

So here is a challenge but it is not for the faint of heart:

What if this Lent we fasted
from the world?

Set ourselves apart from the world.

Not a huge life changing
40 days in the wilderness type fast
but for some time each day.
A few minutes, a half hour each day.

What if
 We fasted from some activity of our lives
 The thing you elect to give up for the Lenten fast
And we took that time
 and devoted it ...to silence.
Filled in the fast
 with silence.
 Let our minds rest
 Let us experience the peace of silence

What if we took that time
 and used it to sit quietly
We took that time to contemplate
 Our lives
 Our sins
 both those things we have done
 and those that we ought to have done.

What if we took that time
 in silent contemplation
 of that plan
 that God had for us
 and contemplated how we have measured up to it.

What if we use a designated time each day for prayer
We use that time in
solitude and
in the contemplation of God.

What if we dedicated a place in our homes where we could
have solitude
A chair
A table
A room
A nook

What if we filled in the fast
took a walk
Took a drive to the redwoods or the beach
in silent prayer and contemplation

We live in a frantic and frenzied world.
Full of confusion,
contradiction,
chaos
cynicism
and criticism.

Full of doubt,
derision,
destruction,
division
and distress.

It is loud,
it is brash,
it is rude

and occasionally it is harsh.

It is fast paced
 with an impossible number of stimuli
 screaming in competition for our attention.
 And we are growing incapable
 of devoting any significant time to any single task.
 Attention spans of our children and even ourselves grow
 shorter every day.

A favorite prayer in the back of the Prayer Book echoes the
 46th psalm and prays
 that in returning and rest we shall be saved
 In quietness and confidence shall be our strength
 By the might of thy Spirit lift us we pray thee to thy
 presence
 Where we may be still and know that thou art God

Jesus went to the wilderness immediately after his baptism
 to prepare himself for his journey to the cross.
 He returned to the wilderness a number of times on the
 journey.

Is He telling us by His example
 that the human condition
 requires a modicum of silent contemplation?

I don't know any of us who can spend 40 days in
 wilderness. But maybe we can spend a few minutes in each
 of the 40 days of Lent
 in a wilderness-like silence of our own creation.
 To be still and know that He is God.

To let the spirit lift us to God's presence
 So the challenge is this:

If we give up/sacrifice some of the time we commonly
 spend

And fill in the fast—take that time
 and at a designated time in each of the 40 days
 set aside a half hour or so
 and spend that time in silent contemplation
 And prayer

Can we but help to
 Find the grace of God
 grow closer to God?

In his Second Epistles to the Corinthian's St Paul told the
 church at Corinth in his mysterious way:

... receive not the grace of God
 in vain
 . . . as having nothing
 and yet
 possessing all things.

Is Paul saying:

That in the void
 or in the nothing of silence
 we possess all things?

That when we are still
 and there is nothing to drown it out,
 we may just be able to hear the voice of God?
 In nothing we will find everything?

... receive not the grace of God in vain . . .
as having nothing
and yet possessing all things.