

Sirach 15:15-20; Ps 118:1-2. 4-5; Cor 2:6-10; Matt 5:17-37

So, we are about to start our walk through Lent. We know we are going, we are going to Easter! It is good. We are beginning – almost – with the Baptism of Ruby, and we will be ending our journey at Easter itself with the Baptism of 5 young people. Of course, we are not really going to be at the end of the journey, we will just be starting, because we are re-setting ourselves.

Easter and Lent. I have come to really like Lent. What! All that giving up stuff, all that aching to have it back, all those moments of forgetting you have given up tea, or chocolate, until you have finished it...? That is not why I like Lent. I like Lent because it reminds me in very stark terms of what I have received in my Baptism, the promise of eternal life, and the forgiveness of my sins. It also reminds me that I have not lived up to my Baptism very well, but I continue to be drawn to live it out. And I want to do that. I want to follow this Lenten path to Easter.

If you think I am talking a little bizarrely, that my words of speaking about finding joy in the wilderness – and that is what I am talking about – seem a little extreme, well then do not take my word for it. Speak to one of those who is seeking Baptism this Easter, or one who is seeking to enter into full Communion with the Church at Pentecost. Ask them why they are doing it. They will probably use different words, and they may not be able to give you a 1 minute sound-bite, but I would guarantee that they are seeking to receive something. What? Well, what I don't think they will say is that seeking to receive a moral code, or a mode of behaviour, although

they may live one out. I don't think that they will say that they seeking to escape their past, although they may wish forgiveness. I don't think that they would answer in a way that suggested that they wanted to run away from what you might call 'real life'. If I would hazard a guess, I would think that they might say that they would say that they wanted Christ. They are not seeking a 'what', they seek a 'who'. And their seeking is a choice.

The Book of Sirach begins with those stern lines: *'If you desire, you will keep the commandments, and to act faithfully is a matter of choice.'* 'If you desire...'. The commandments Sirach talks of is the Mosaic law, the teachings of loving God above all else and loving your neighbour as yourself. But for us, as Christians, the law is no longer written in tablets of stone, but in human flesh and the divine spirit of Jesus Christ. It is towards him that we act faithfully. It is in him that we act faithfully. Which is good, because I know that my 'choice' is actually often weak or poor. I need something beyond my own power. Those who seek, or are presented for Baptism, understand this. They understand to that choose Christ and to follow him, to be faithful to him they must rest in Him. This is what the path of Lent is for.

Lent reminds us that we need to 'desire Christ' and to 'rest in Christ'. Lent means conversion. Conversion as the little booklet *'The Meaning of Lent'*, says as it quotes St Augustine: *'is a "shift of Love'*,

*from cupiditas to caritas; the heart moves from self-love to self-giving love.*¹ Such Conversion leads to Easter.

My children who are preparing to receive your 1st Holy Communion, you are preparing to receive your Baptismal food, your Easter Food, the Body and Blood of Jesus. It is nothing less, and there is nothing more. This is why you are preparing for it with all your heart, with daily prayer and mounting excitement. It is so that you yearn to receive Jesus, so that Lent which is coming is no obstacle to fulfilment, but the path to the one who is our fulfilment. Choose – with your parents to guide you - what you are giving up, do so as a family; choose what and when you are going to pray more: do so as a family; choose how you are going to serve the poor: do so as a family.

You who are to be Baptised at Easter: continue to choose Christ. It is a daily exercise to choose to Love. Use your whole heart and your whole mind to follow Him into the wilderness and encounter the Father. Go in thirsty and drink. Your prayer and your fasting and your almsgiving should seem natural to you. Seek the Holy One and ask that he make you holy.

You who are already Baptised, you who already receive His Body and Blood, remember and refresh and reinvigorate in yourselves what you are doing, who you are becoming. Walk once again into the wilderness of Lent in humility, with your eyes cast down so that you only see the footprints of Jesus as he walks before you, and rejoice with prayer, fasting and almsgiving knowing that he is leading you to Easter, and that is where He desires you to be.

¹ CTS, *The Meaning of Lent*, p. 8.