

Wednesday, March 05, 2025

Ash Wednesday

The Solemn Liturgy of Ash Wednesday

12:00 pm

+

A Sermon by

The Rev. Canon Carl Turner

+

Taking Stock...

“Let us set out on the path of fasting and use these 40 days to take stock of ourselves, to free ourselves from the dictatorship of full schedules, crowded agendas, and superficial needs, and choose the things that truly matter.”
Words of Pope Francis.

What would that kind of fast look like to you? We so easily think of fasting as giving up some of our food or, worse, denying ourselves the little treats that we take for granted. But could fasting be something more powerful and, perhaps, have nothing to do with diet at all? Listen again to Pope Francis’ words:

“Let us set out on the path of fasting and use these 40 days to take stock of ourselves, to free ourselves from the dictatorship of full schedules, crowded agendas, and superficial needs, and choose the things that truly matter.”

To live a holy lent, then, requires us to take stock and to take control. In so doing we re-align our often busy and frenetic schedules with the promptings of God who calls us to re-discover what really matters.

To do this is hard; it takes time. I remember once Michael Ramsey, when he was Archbishop of Canterbury, being interviewed on the television. The interviewer moved to the subject of prayer and asked the Archbishop a very direct question: “How much time do you spend in prayer each day?” Without hesitating, Archbishop Ramsey said, “Oh...about two minutes.” The interviewer was clearly thrown by the answer, “Two minutes, Archbishop? Is that all?” “Oh yes,” said Michael Ramsey, “But it generally takes me an hour to get there.”

Our lives are so often crowded out by full schedules, crowded agendas, and superficial needs that we have no space to discover stillness, and it takes time to get there.

If you go to the back of the Lady Chapel, there you will see a print of a painting by Norman Rockwell for the Saturday Evening Post. It is a beautiful image of the façade of Saint Thomas Church in 1957; Dr. Morris, the Tenth Rector, is looking down on Fifth Avenue as a verger is precariously balanced on a ladder placing plastic lettering into a noticeboard; words from the prophecy of Isaiah “Lift up thine eyes.” Meanwhile, a vast throng of passerby are walking furiously past the church, their gaze towards the sidewalk, and missing the glorious gothic architecture above them. It is a powerful image and one that I recognize every day I look into Fifth Avenue – the only difference being that, these days, most people have a mobile device in their hand.

This Lenten season is a time for release from the monotony of our daily lives; a time for us to be set free of the constraints of busy schedules, crowded agendas, and superficial needs. Michael Ramsey knew that he

had to set aside real time for true stillness to take root in his own busy life – and that was *before* the advent of computers, mobile devices, fax machines, and even the internet.

So, what are you going to fast from this Lent? And I don't mean meat or chocolate or alcohol. What is it that needs to go, in order for us to have the space to choose the things that really matter?

Let us set out on the path of fasting and use these 40 days to take stock of ourselves...
