

I THINK I'LL GIVE UP CRUNCHIES FOR LENT!

I think I'll give up crunchies for Lent! I guess to most people this immediately sounds a bit wacky. I mean if I loved crunchies such a statement might have some merit. The truth of the matter is I rarely eat a crunchie!

...I hope you realise at this stage that I am joking. For me to say that I intend to give up crunchies for Lent is not only silly, but more importantly, it could show a lack of respect for one of the most sacred seasons in the Church year. There's no doubt though, people approach Lent in a variety of ways: smokers might see Lent as a time to try and break the habit, others as time to lose weight. I actually heard it the other day, 'thank God it's Lent next week and hopefully I'll lose a few pounds!'

Now look, we can get a little spiritually snooty about these things. There's no point making a fuss that those engaged in the battle of the bulge, or trying to quit smoking or give up the 'demon drink' are not taking Lent seriously. They may well be. That's not for us to judge. It's far more important to think through our own plans for Lent.

I use the word deliberately because I have learned from previous years that if I don't have a clear plan, then Lent comes and goes and before I know it we are into Holy Week. Now we can slip into being very harsh and judgmental with regard to this, not only of others but ourselves as well, which of course is neither helpful, nor in fact is it good for our soul. However, rather than see our failure to, in some way live Lent, as a reason for blame or castigation, I prefer to see Lent as opportunity. Before exploring this I would like to make a note with regard to Lent and Easter.

The point here is, a little bit like my gradual learning of the importance of having the plan, I now also realise that how I live Lent, or indeed how I fail to live Lent, has a direct bearing on how well I celebrate Easter. My logic is as follows: Easter is clearly the greatest of all our celebrations. Easter is when we remember, and give God thanks, that He loved us so much that he sent his only Son, Jesus, that we might be saved. It's a great and beautiful feast. It follows that it is a time of grace. However we need to be receptive to this grace. We need to be open. We need to have prepared the soil. Lent is the sowing. Easter the harvest. Lent is the investment, Easter the dividend, the legacy. With this in mind I can honestly say the years I lived Lent well, were the years that I experienced the most Easter joy. (I am sure I do not need to remind you not to confuse that beautiful gift of the Holy Spirit with its more glitzy cousin, happiness.)

So back to Lent, the plan, and the significance of it, mindful of the great opportunity it affords. I favour a two fold approach. Let me put it in the form of a statement, or perhaps as a resolve or promise. It's my Lenten Contract. It might sound like this:

'By Spy Wednesday this year I will be closer to Jesus, by which I mean I will be better acquainted with him than I am now AND I will be a less sinful person'.

Now that's not bad as an aim, or a goal or objective or intention, but the next step is crucial. So we have the 'what of our Lent' now we need it's 'how'. So now it might look like this:

'By Spy Wednesday I will become closer to Jesus through a weekly slow meditative Scripture rosary and my daily ten minutes reading from my favourite gospel or psalm followed by ten minutes sacred silence listening for the Lord. I will be less sinful through depriving myself of alcohol or dessert and matching this with a kind comment or good turn for a couple of people, especially people I am not that keen on. The money I will save on the drink or the desserts throughout Lent, I will give to Peter McVerry or St. Vincent de Paul'.

Corny? Not for you? What's your plan? Whatever it is my friends, don't fail to live Lent this year. It's too good an opportunity to miss. You'll know the benefit of it come Easter.