



St Mark's Church, Reigate

February 2021

Letter from the Vicar, Father Martin Colton

Dear Friends,

Ash Wednesday, which marks the beginning of Lent, the season of penitence, self-examination and fasting running up to Easter, is on 17th February this year. Although the discipline of fasting isn't popular today, Lent is one of the few times when we might consider abstaining from something so that we might focus on God.

Fasting should play an important part in the Christian life. Jesus began his earthly ministry by fasting in the wilderness for 40 days and he taught his disciples to fast. In Matthew's gospel he tells them "when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen." (Matthew 6.17-18). Note he uses the word "when" and not "if". So why should we fast?

Well, first, giving up something in our lives shows that we want to put God first in our lives. Second, fasting shows us how much we depend on things other than God in our lives. How often when we've had a bad day do we reach for that bar of chocolate or our favourite tippie instead of reaching out to God? Third, fasting encourages us to have a deeper hunger and dependency for God in our lives. Fasting gives space for us to humbly focus on God for his strength, provision, and wisdom and results in a more intimate relationship with Christ. It also enables the Holy Spirit to reveal our true spiritual condition, leading to brokenness, repentance, and a transformed life, with a heart more attentive to God.

Fasting traditionally involves missing one or two meals during the day. Not everyone can do this. For example, some people cannot abstain from regular meals for medical reasons. Fasting can also include abstaining or limiting the time we give to things like television, alcohol or social media. But this year some faith groups are suggesting on social media that we shouldn't be asking people to give up something as we have already given up so much over the past year. Instead, they are suggesting that we do something positive.

This has been my practice for a number of years. I see Lent as a time to embrace new spiritual disciplines e.g. joining a study group, giving more time to prayer and Bible study, "random acts of kindness", or keeping a gratitude journal. I particularly like the "random acts of kindness". They can make a huge difference to someone's day. But whatever you do, let's make Lent count this year.

With my best wishes.