

RECTOR'S RAMBLINGS March 2025

I remember the very real fear that gripped me the first time I left my house wearing my new clerical collar. I tried to push down my nerves, the impostor syndrome, and walked out into the village. Almost every priest has had to face the day after Ordination where you have to go out into the world dressed as a vicar, and feeling utterly unsuitable and exposed. On this day I was halfway down the road when I was stopped by a man I didn't recognise. He wanted to tell me how much he had enjoyed the wedding service I had taken the other month. This was a very kind thing of him to say, and very supportive. I was rather sad to have to tell him that, as I had only been ordained the day before, I hadn't taken any weddings ever, and certainly not the one he had been to. After a bit of talking and thinking we were able to identify the priest who had taken the service. As it happens I did know them, the Reverend Pelly (known as Lulu to her friends), a kind, engaging, very thin lady in her later 60s.

I learnt something very important that day, more often than you might expect, people only notice the collar. I have been mistaken for other priests who are different ages, genders, and races (sometimes all three) simply because I am the person in a clerical collar vaguely in the space that they are expected to be. This is an aspect of being a priest that has always made me smile. We wear collars as a visible sign of the life we are called to lead, so that whether we are doing good, ill, or just buying a paper, we can be easily identified as Christians who are trying to live according to the teachings of God.

This month we begin our Lenten Journey. It will lead us from the ashes - if not the sackcloth - of Ash Wednesday, through 40 days of self-denial, self-restraint, and self-examination, before we reach Holy Week, the crowds, the trial, the injustice, the cross, and then the tomb. Few people look forward to Lent, but it is a useful time. Societies and individuals who can train themselves to deal with hardship and scarcity, as well as plenty (we have feast days as well) find it easier to manage the ups and downs of life. It is a good habit for us all. It is also a time when we are asked to consider what we really need - what is really important to us - and to realise when something, some false idol, has snuck into our lives and begun to take over. For many it has been a shock to realise how much that chocolate cake or cigarette is key to their daily pattern, or how hard it is to actually make sure we do spend time with family or loved ones. In Lent we look at our lives and ask what it is that is really important to us, and what we wish to prioritise.

Lent is a time that is about substance rather than appearance. The collar, like any uniform, like Lent, does not make us suddenly better or different. We are asked what it is we wish to be, what is important to us, and then given time to strive towards living up to that uniform, to that calling, living up to Lent. You see, Lent and its fasting and denial is not an end in itself, the end comes at Easter, when God shows us the love that can overturn the grinding pessimism of the world, forgive sins, turn slaves, fishermen, and bigots into leaders and lovers of faith, and leaves the tombs empty. That is the end of Lent, and the beginning of new life.

Lent asks us to look beneath the superficial, to what is underneath. What is important to you, really? Once you know that, look at your life and ask where is the clutter, where am I focused, and where is God? He is there.

Reverend George