

Facing the cross




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Patsy McGregor *reflects on* John 12:20-33

Does it help you to know that Jesus had a troubled heart, or that raw and powerful emotion pressed upon him as he faced death? Emotionally exposed and filled with turmoil, Jesus predicted his future. He would reign – but not without sacrifice, paying a high price. Overcoming temptation, Jesus learned obedience through suffering.

Through his agony and turmoil, the Son of Man had a clear vision. Even in distress, with a troubled heart, Jesus had the big picture in mind and chose obedience, knowing that glory would come and the suffering would pass. In learning obedience, Jesus became the everlasting source of salvation for all who obey him. He offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears on our behalf, choosing obedience as a learned discipline.

Lent is an appropriate time to practise Christian discipline which, in turn, leads to our clearer vision. In the Diocese of Toliara in Madagascar, where I once lived and worked, we practised five personal devotions – giving, obedience, fasting, discipleship and sharing faith. Jesus is our role model. He learned obedience from what he suffered. He predicted his death, and yet it did not deter him from facing the cross because he knew in the end, his sacrifice was for you and me.

How can you practise the disciplines in your life? 

Teach me your ways, O Lord. I choose obedience and follow your commands. I study your instructions and examine your teachings. I take pleasure in following your path. Thank you for the Spirit, which keeps your law in my heart. Amen.

The Church Fathers

Part 1, the infant Church


by Richard Gunning

A seven-part series in which Richard Gunning looks at some of the early Church Fathers.

The second century was a turbulent time in Christian history. St Paul and the twelve apostles had died, yet word was spreading and communities sprang up in Galilee, Samaria, Damascus, Antioch and Rome. They were regarded as sects within the Jewish faith, although many devout Jews objected to the association. Worse, Christians were arguing among themselves. One sect, the Gnostics, believed they had special knowledge and rejected the doctrine of the

resurrection of the body. Another faction taught asceticism, while another, heretical in the extreme, taught that the Old Testament God of the Jews was not good enough to have been the father of Jesus.


This, then, was the scene into which the early Church Fathers emerged – a vibrant mixture of original thinkers, persuasive teachers and prolific writers. Many were unafraid to die martyrs' deaths for their beliefs. Over the coming weeks, we will look at the achievements of some of these influential figures.

Richard lives in Surrey and preaches at local churches. His passion is the golf course – for freedom, fresh air and inspiration. 

Lent lunch – a cup of water

by Ricarda Witcombe

We don't only need food to be sustained, we need water as well. Most people reading this are not in a place where water is scarce. We turn on the tap and out it flows. How differently would we live if we needed to walk for miles to get water? If you have water at your Lent lunch, take notice of it. How does it taste? How does it feel as you swallow

it? Many of us who live in places of plentiful supply don't drink enough water through the day, and our bodies have to work harder than they would if they were well hydrated. We simply don't attend to our body's real needs. We often don't attend to the needs of our souls, either. Jesus tells us that the water he gives will become a spring in our souls, gushing up to eternal life. May we, like the woman at the well, drink of this water always. 

“So begin: and continually repeat and repeat, but all the time keep before you the thought of our Lord.”

Theophan the Recluse (1815-1894), saint in the Russian Orthodox Church