

“Welcome Deare Feast of Lent”

Welcome deare feast of Lent: who loves not thee,
He loves not Temperance or Authoritie
But is compos'd of passion.
The Scriptures bid us *fast*: the Church says, *now*:
Give to thy Mother, what thou wouldst allow
To ev'ry Corporation.

Thus does George Herbert begin his poem ‘Lent’: “Welcome deare feast of Lent.” A ‘feast’ he calls it. Days of deprivation and discipline lie ahead, for the season of Lent, as we know quite well, is modeled on our Lord’s forty-day fast in the wilderness, a grueling experience that left him weak and hungry. But Herbert calls Lent a feast, for in the denial of the needs of the body and of the flesh one finds a richness of fare, a spiritual wealth that is generally obscured by worldliness and preoccupation with things temporal.

So Herbert, like our Lord, turns the usual values upside down. The world is at bottom hedonistic. “Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow you die,” as if today were everything, tomorrow nothing. Said our Lord of the rich man who filled his barns full, “Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee” (Lk. 12:20). Or again he asked, “What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Mk. 8:36). Or once more he said, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it” (Lk. 9:23-24).

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Passion is that ungoverned and ungovernable will that knows no Lord, that seeks its own. It is a wild horse that throws from its head the reins and bridle of God. Passion is the old Adam, the first, who would not practice temperance, who would not own

Authority, and in the bargain lost Paradise. The second Adam withstood the Tempter, owned no authority but God's, and in the bargain regained Paradise.

The discipline of Lent then calls us to fast as our Lord did fast,
to learn from him and with him to cast our all upon God,
to realize anew that we do not live by bread alone
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God,
to confess that spiritual realities are the most real of all, the
most important, the most abiding, the most rewarding.

“Welcome deare feast of Lent!”

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Herbert also suggested that by following thus in the path of Christ we may perchance meet Christ. Wrote he,

Who goeth in the way which Christ hath gone,
Is much more sure to meet with him, than one
That travelleth by-ways.
Perhaps my God, though he be farre before,
May turn and take me by the hand, and more
May strengthen my decayes.

Oh, what a promise is that, that we travel not this road alone! Christ has not only gone before to prove the way, he will reach his hand toward us to help us through. And so, you see, the fast becomes a feast when he who is the bread of life and wine of heaven accompanies us on the way.

“The Scriptures bid us *fast*; the Church says *now*.

Welcome deare feast of Lent.”

Sermon preach by the Rev'd Fr. Voris G. Brookshire at the Anglican Catholic Church of Saint John the Theologian, Pompano Beach, FL, at Evensong on the First Sunday of Lent, March 1, 2009. Copyright © 2009.