

WHAT SHALL I DO THIS LENT ?

TO this plain question we should each of us resolve to give a practical response: for as Lent is a solemn season set apart for fasting and devotion, so we shall most surely have to answer before God for its use or abuse. And yet how constantly persons—members of the Church—excuse themselves from observing Lent at all! Either they “do not approve” of fasting, or are “too weak” to practise it; or they have no time for extra devotion; or they cannot, without offending others, break with the World and its pleasures:—excuses generally altogether false, shallow, and dangerous; for all can keep Lent, though they be young or old, sick or in health, rich or poor. The Church of England, in common with the rest of Christendom, enjoins on her children the obligation of fasting during the forty days of Lent, therefore we will not stay to discuss this law of our Mother (in the observance of which, if such be in our power, we shall gain the blessing of the obedient), but proceed to consider briefly some of those dispositions and practices by which still further all of us may keep Lent holily, to God’s glory and our souls’ eternal advantage.

I. The great work of Lent is to do penance for our sins; and to this end we must examine our lives and actions by the rule of God’s Commandments; confess and forsake our sins, daily laying them at the feet of our adorable Lord, and, with tears of sorrow, ask that they may be blotted out in His Precious Blood. The past may be black; our garments (once cleansed in the waters of Baptism) may be soiled with the filth of sin; but He will wash out the stains, if we are contrite; and if we use the means of grace He has left us in His Church, He will say, “Go in peace, thy sins are forgiven thee.”

II. The true fast of a Christian is to abstain from sin: this is of obligation to all; without this, fasting is a mere pretence and mockery, and, like the fasts of the corrupt Jews of old, will provoke God to anger. Fasting should be not only a restraint upon our appetites in regard to meat and drink, but a real mortification of all our senses—an abstinence from idle conversations, detraction, and evil-speaking; from carnal pleasures and self-indulgence; from worldly diversions and gay company; and, above all, from the indulgence of our besetting sin, of our self-will, pride, and evil tempers. Let it, then, be our work this Lent, with the help of God’s Holy Spirit, to do something more in these respects than we have done before, and to engage ourselves more deeply and solemnly in the service of our indulgent and merciful Lord.

III. Besides the great work of repentance, Lent is also instituted to be a time of prayer and devotion, and preparation for the solemnities of Easter. Away from the world, its distractions and dissipation, taking our station humbly at the foot of the Cross, let us, by daily meditation and constant prayer, contemplate Him Who suffered for our salvation. Christ crucified is our best book of devotions, and Calvary the safest retreat for the penitent.