

Notes to help you plan your resolutions and the one or two priorities that will become part of your Way of Living.

- ◇ Reclaim time and space for quality relationships
- ◇ Put a stop to waste; enjoy just having enough, not more
- ◇ Find God's mercy through radical, individual repentance

LENT

Adjusting desires

Wiser use of time, space, the earth

What will make you happy? That's a profoundly Christian question, as much as it is one asked by politicians, economists, retailers and the media.

The answer you get from each of those groupings will be very different. All, except the Christian response, will describe what will make you happy now.

The Christian response will do that, but only in the light of what will guarantee your happiness for ever, eternally (Matt 5.1-11 *New Jerusalem Bible*).

Giving stuff up is not, of itself, the way to happiness. But giving up what can be destructive of our Christian and human freedom is a step towards the happiness of heaven: "Do not be conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewing of your minds" (Rom 12.2). Adjusting our desires can be a small rehearsal of what it means to die: it is to let go of our hold on stuff in time and space.

1. This Lent, as you think about what you are going to include in your *Way of Living*, don't focus simply on getting through 40 days without something you might binge on for 50 days of Easter. Focus on something that you need to relinquish or regulate, so that it does not determine your life.

So much modern technology controls us. Now is your chance

to push back. Find more space in your life. Seek a bigger investment in time for something, relational and human, that has divine potential. Examples include music, friendship, gardening, voluntary service, and prayer.

(NB We have already mentioned prayer in the Advent season: this could be a good moment to check out your intercessory prayer and check on what other forms of prayer you wish to use, such as prayer through scripture, meditation, the liturgical prayer of the Daily Office and the Eucharist.)

2. And the earth. Technology has given us fabulous time and energy saving devices, though it's not always clear that we have good and cheering things to do with our time.

But here's a question: how much do you waste? Not just time, but material stuff as well. What do you throw away? Remember the poem, *The Invitation*, by George Herbert:

Come ye hither All, whose taste

Is your waste;

Save your cost, and mend your fare.

We have a terribly strong taste for waste: but the God of generosity wants all people to share in God's abundance.

The Christian record on creation is that human beings are the stewards of creation (Psalm 8). Your *Way of Living* should include something that reverses the pattern of waste.

And what might the outcome be? Saving money, and saving the earth's resources for the next generation. That's good.

Better still, the outcome of praise and thanksgiving to God (Psalm 147).

3. You might also want to think about pulling together a review of your use and misuse of God's gifts, by making your confession.

The Church of England provision for this is in the Visitation of the Sick, in the Book of Common Prayer.

It requires courage to tell your story of the damaging things you have done. It's a conversation between you and God. The priest is present as your friend and God's minister but it is your business, that's why it's "sealed" and may never be mentioned again.

Remember that the priest is also a penitent. Speak as one sinner to another. Tell the facts, no excuses, no names; be brief. We sin by what we think, say, do, or fail to do, and we sin in relationship with God, other people, and ourselves. We live in a complex world. If something troubles you, say so. It may or may not be sinful; it must not become the cause of fear and guilt.

What is the outcome? Forgiveness, the intention to change and to avoid the damage of the past. And God's response? "But still I love you and always will."