

March 2018

The Rector writes:

‘TIME OUT’



I wonder what image came to mind as you read the above title! Perhaps you thought of the magazine or app provided by the ‘Time Out’ media and entertainment group that seeks to inspire you to make the most of the opportunities provided to fully experience and enjoy city life. Or maybe you thought of the breaks called as intervals in sporting events – that make an hour of play in an American football game last for two hours or more!

The former recently suggested that we should ‘make the most of our free time by filling it with all the great and wonderful events that London has to offer!’ – but if we fill all our time is it really free? The sporting context offers ‘a break in play to enable the coach to communicate with his team to determine strategy or inspire morale’ – a worthwhile task no doubt, yet it still takes up rather than takes out time.

We all need time for rest and recreation – time that is different to our everyday occupation. The season of Lent, which we are currently in, is one such time perhaps for a Christian to take time out – but precious time out to be with God. This Holy season reminds us of the time that Jesus spent in the wilderness, for him a time of testing, a time of fasting, a time of discipline, a time of preparation, of honing for ministry.

When Saint Martin of Tours gave up the life of a soldier in the Roman army, he travelled to Poitiers where with the help of Bishop Hilary he was encouraged to become a ‘soldier of Christ’. He became a missionary in the provinces of Pannonia and Illyricum (now in the Balkan Peninsula), where he opposed ‘Arianism’, a heresy that denied the divinity of ‘Christ’. During this period of his life Martin spent much time on his own, often walking long distances. Wherever he went he

faced hardship and resistance, on one occasion was attacked by robbers, and despite his life being threatened began to tell them about Jesus. Forced out of Illyricum by the Arians, Martin went to Italy, crossing the Alps on foot, first to Milan and then to the island of Gallinaria. Here Martin spent two years living alone, eating only roots and drinking spring water, and at one point almost died when he ate a poisonous plant. But all the time he was being honed by the wilderness and becoming more and more aware of and reliant on the grace of God. Martin came out of his solitude, chastened by his experience and desperate for dialogue with his mentor Hilary. So Martin returned to the world a wiser man. He no longer saw the suffering of solitude as the best way to God, and determined never to reject human companionship again. Thus Martin emerged from the wilderness and was ready to discover the most purposeful and creative years of his life.

Though most of us will, I hope, never face such trials as St Martin, nevertheless wilderness time is a part of our lives. We cannot live and love and engage life in meaningful ways without sometimes ending up needing a ‘Time Out’. Wilderness times are those times when we feel we are pressed to our limits, and we describe those ‘Time Outs’ in these terms: dry, desolate, lonely, trying, difficult, agonizing. We speak of hunger, thirst, and longing in a barren territory. We need to explore this difficult spiritual territory in Jesus’ company. In one sense that is what we are trying to do in Lent – to spend perhaps a little more time in prayer and contemplation as we journey towards the Cross. Perhaps you will do this quietly at home, or you might join a Lent study group or maybe even take a few days away on retreat, as I am hoping to do this year. Whatever you do I pray that you will find the time you take out may ultimately be rewarding, refreshing, and bring you closer to your Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Hoping you have a Holy Lent,

Yours in Christ, Reverend John, your Rector.