

Diocese of Middlesbrough Adult Formation | Journey to Easter Episode 1

Introduction

Announcer, welcome to journey to Easter, the podcast where three friends come together to share our Lenten journey, struggles and triumphs. The aim is to encourage each other and you to make the most of this sacred season. So whether you're walking your first lent or your 50th grab a cup of tea. Take a quiet moment and join us as we journey to Easter.

Nicola

Hello and welcome to the first episode of this brand new podcast from the Diocese of Middlesbrough. Adult Formation journey to Easter. My name is Nicola Sweetman, and I am Adult Formation coordinator for the diocese, and I'm joined here today by two of my friends who will introduce themselves in a moment to you. But we are really glad that you can join us, and we hope that this will be an opportunity just to journey together and to receive all the graces that the Lord has for us this Easter. So first of all, I'd like to welcome my friend. Father Philip. Father Phil, how are you?

Fr Phil

Well today, I'm excited for this journey together. So yeah. Father Phil Cunnah, priest of the Diocese and parish priest in the southern deanery, so covering the towns of Withernsea and Hedon and also the Church of St Charles Borromeo in the centre of Hull.

Nicola

Wonderful. It's great to have you with us. And Emma. Hello.

Emma

My name is Emma Morrison. I work as a doctor, and I'm also information for consecrated virginity in the diocese, so God willing, will be consecrated this September, which is super exciting. And I live in Guisborough, so just outside Middlesbrough in the parish of St Paulina,

Nicola

Wonderful, and I am in our central deanery. I am in York, and I, as well as working in Adult Formation, I am married to the wonderful Kevin, and we have two children. So, we have all the busyness of family life going on, as well as other things. So today, we're just going to start off by chatting a little bit about our hopes for Lent, a little bit about what we are planning for Lent, what we've got going on. And each week we're going to anchor the episode with a passage from the Gospel, from the Sunday's gospel, just to help focus us and to help guide our conversations.

So we're going to start off today with a reading from the Gospel of Matthew

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil, and after fasting 40 days and forty nights, he was hungry, and the tempter came and said to him, if you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread. But he answered, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God, then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, if you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written, He will command his angels concerning you, and on their hands, they will bear you up lest you, lest you strike your foot against the stone. Jesus said to him again, it is written, You shall not put the Lord, your God to the test. Again. The devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, all these, I will give to you if you fall down and worship me. Then Jesus said to him, Be gone Satan, for it is written, You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve. Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

Nicola

So that's probably quite a familiar gospel for most of us. Often heard at the start of Lent often, kind of the one we might even think about when we begin to think about our Lenten practice. And I'm just interested to hear from you guys about mean, anything that stands out to you, but also kind of your plans, your hopes for this Lenten season. And Emma, anything you want to share with us, what you've got going on, sure.

Emma

So I think just listening to that passage fresh today, there's something about how, you know, only one of those, those things was about food, only one of them was about that kind of, that physical hunger. But yeah, listening to those, those things, that kind of Jesus is holding himself back from there in that kind of, that hunger for power, that hunger for influence, that hunger to kind of been shown favoured by God. So this

passage actually came up quite big in my retreat last year, and particularly just thinking about this, this kind of temptation the devil uses of you know, if you're the Son of God, where we've just heard the passage a bit just before this is, is Jesus's baptism, where, where God speaks over him like, This is My beloved Son. And I think there's something in this passage for me about, what am I wanting to prove to God in Lent, what am I wanting to kind of prove to myself or prove to other people that God doesn't actually need me to prove so I think when we talk about kind of challenges going into Lent or deciding what to do for Lent, there's really Yeah, something for me about not trying to do this to prove myself. I'm not fasting because I want to prove to God how much I love him, or how good I am at fasting, but actually, really just trying to listen to the spirit for what do I actually need to do? Like, how is God actually inviting me? Me to grow in in this season?

Fr Phil

For me, it's follows nicely on a journey that I've been on already. So I'm very conscious of, you know, where am I at this point, coming into Lent? And that might be a question for our listeners as well. Where have we been on coming into Lent? You know, it's very often not a total break in the journey, but actually, the Lord will use this for me. I've been looking a lot at Ignatian spirituality, and particularly how Ignatius talks about the bad spirit who discourages us, who tempts us towards vice, and the good spirit who wants to inspire us and move us more towards faith, hope and charity. So I think for me, you know, I see Jesus in the midst of that sort of battle, I suppose, if you want to call it that, you know these, these tensions that go on in our life. And it's made me think, you know, and perhaps I just want to take some time for an exam and each day, which means to to pause, perhaps at the end of the day, and to look over the day with the help of the Lord, with the light of the Spirit, and to say, you know, where did I feel encouraged? Where did I feel discouraged? And to notice those different spiritual movements in my life. And hearing Jesus in the midst of that makes me think I can sit with Jesus during this journey and allow him to perhaps sit with me and be a companion in that so, yeah, maybe there's something of wanting to be a companion with Jesus on his 40 days through my own, you know, living out of the 40 days of Lent as well.

Nicola 8:24

And that really speaks to me, because I often see lent as kind of an opportunity to reset and think about maybe, like, what progress have I made over the past year, and how have I let that slip in some areas, and just an opportunity then to bring some of those things back and just thinking of a really practical example, I I'm sure this relates to many people, but struggle with the use of my phone. You know, I love a good scroll through Instagram and and one of the things that I did in the past year was started charging my

phone downstairs so that it wasn't the last thing that I looked at at night, and it wasn't the first thing I looked at in the morning. And I've got to admit that practice has slipped slightly, and so just getting back to that is I feel like it's a kind of mini fast because it's not giving up. I'm last year, I gave up social media for Lent, and I'm not doing that this year, but I do feel called to kind of curb, if you like, my use of my phone, and just in kind of put a little fasting in the morning and in the night as a way of focusing in on actually having the Lord is the first thing I think of when I wake up and trying to have a moment of prayer with him. And likewise, at night. I have got an exam and book, actually, that I have right next to where I go to sleep, and that I sometimes write in it, but it's more often than not. Think, oh yeah, I should do that more. So that's a good, a good reminder. So mate, I don't, I don't think I'll take it up, but I might do this Lent, but I also. Feel like the Lord is really inviting me to explore what it means to rest in Him. And at first I thought, well, that doesn't sound very Lenten, because rest doesn't seem very penitential, but actually, as I kind of prayed about it a bit more, I felt like the Lord was inviting me to rest in Him and find out what that really means.

Fr Phil

So just as you were speaking there, Nicola, it made me think of the Lord's words at the beginning of the gospel of John, because the two disciples are following, he turns around and says, Some translations. It's, what do you want? Or we might say, What are you looking for. And so I think, you know, relating that to looking through the scrolling, you know, you wonder, what are we what are we looking for when we're looking through on our phone? Or, you know, perhaps, as you were saying, Emma about, you know, the temptations that the devil's given, what am I looking for in consolation, perhaps from food, or from these moments where, you know, I kind of, I find influence, or I find I don't know, something's given to my ego. You know, what am I looking for in all of those things? And am I looking for the Lord? And if I'm looking for the Lord in them, then I'm finding rest in Him. I would say

Nicola

that is really interesting, and definitely something that I think I will take to prayer. But just and, yeah, I think I just heard somebody say that our whole life is about just turning our face, our gaze back to the Lord. More and more that kind of each season, each each day, really is a new opportunity to turn our gaze back to him. And sometimes that's like a quite a dramatic movement, but actually it's more of a for some of us. It's more of a slow turning back to him over and over again. And yeah, I think it lent us a great opportunity for that. What about in terms then, of things that we might want to give up for Lent? Has anybody got any inspiration that might help other people? I know just I mean, my kids

are decided they're going to give up sugar, and then are working out all the foods that include sugar, like, they've just discovered that fruit just like include sugar. So they're like, We don't want to give up fruit, so we've decided we're giving up refined sugar. So sweets, basically, and it's quite a traditional one, but they've come up with it themselves, so we're going with it as a family. But I wonder if there's any other kind of, maybe alternatives that people are considering. Emma, what about you?

Emma

So I think for me, there was something as we were preparing to make this podcast, and preparing for Lent, of just sitting and thinking, okay, like, what is coming up again and again, that, like, I feel God is actually inviting me to maybe address during Lent. And one of my, my big things that I bring very regularly to confession or spiritual direction, is like impatience. You're like thinking that everything I want, I want it right now. You know, it's like we've talked before about that Amazon Prime mindset of that, you know, I want what I want, and I want it right now. So I was trying to think of ways I can kind of get out of that mindset of, you know, you know, seeing kind of those day to day activities, of going out to get something as a kind of a holy thing and a place potentially, of encounter. So I've actually decided to give up my online shop. So I've got very into, into a good, good old order everything to my house, and then I don't have to go to the supermarket. I don't have to deal with the slow person in front of me at the checkout. But just really trying to see that opportunity to kind of, yeah, growing patients to potentially, I love it when you when you go to Guisborough is a small town, when you go around the supermarket, you almost definitely see someone, someone you know, particularly if you go immediately after mass or something at church, there's always someone from the parish there. And actually, you can have some real beautiful, kind of spontaneous encounters with people. And I just think there's something around Yeah, being around other people, being Yeah, close to people, and not seeing kind of people as obstacles that get in the way of me getting what I want as quickly as I want it. So yeah. See, that's, that's what I'm thinking for Lent, I am also going to do the classic thing of giving up chocolate. And actually, the sole reason for that is because I really love on the east, or just after the Easter Vigil, like, just like, absolutely bingeing the chocolate. Then I love coming from the east of India and having, like, as many cream eggs and as much chocolate as they can, like, eat in one go. So yeah, trying to do that just for the sheer like, put off benefit. Of after the Easter Vigil, stuffing my face, yeah. What about you for the film?

Fr Phil

I must confess, I am a terrible, faster, absolutely terrible, I think partly just because I love, I love life. I love, I love the world. I love. You know, someone says she would go for a coffee. Think Great. Let's go for a coffee. You know, do you want cake? Yeah, I want a cake. Of course. I want a cake. Cakes are great. You know, love cakes, all these different things. So I think, for me, with the fasting this year, I'll start small, because I know if I set my sights on on the Easter vigil and starting all over again. Then, then I'll definitely fail. I won't get that far. So what I'll do is I'll try and stay present, day to day, and find moments where I can just say, you know, there's something better at stake here. So I'm going to say no to that, and I'll make that little offering in my heart to the Lord. Sometimes it's, you know, you get a cup of tea, and you don't put your milk in, you know, and you can just offer that, that that milk, that milk-less Tea, that doesn't always taste the same. Sometimes someone offer me a biscuit. Maybe I'll just say, I don't need the biscuit, you know. Avoid those things. Sometimes it's driving and, you know, as kind of building a bit what you were saying there, Emma, about kind of everything now, now, now, just to be a bit aware that I can pause and let someone out, you know, and sometimes that's just a little fast in the day where I put my own agenda aside and say, practically speaking, I can Help someone in this moment, if I'm just ready to give up my priority, if you want to put it that way,

Nicola

one of the things that's really helped me think about fasting a little bit differently is quite a few years ago now, a friend of mine said to me, Oh, it was at the beginning of Lent, and He said, Oh, do some fasting for me. And I was like, oh, okay, well, right. And I was thinking about, well, it's about me and me getting closer to Jesus fasting, but this idea of fasting for a particular intention and offering that, you know, when you're missing out that thing, when you've noticed that you're not doing the thing that you normally would, or you're saying no to that biscuit and offering the prayer in that moment for somebody else. And that really helped me kind of, I suppose, be a bit more intentional, because at the time, I said, Oh yeah, we'll do so I knew I had to actually do it. And just having some intentions in mind, obviously Lent is a great season for us to get closer to God, but also offering some of our small sufferings for other people, and having some people in mind for that, I think can be a helpful way of looking at it.

Fr Phil

And I think that's totally like the witness of the Christian community as well. In the Acts of the Apostles, they like make a decision after prayer and fasting. And you know, the prayer is always important, but they always seems to be attached to fasting. So you

know, their witness to us, their example to us, is that, you know, these two things kind of go together.

Nicola

Yeah, you're right. Absolutely, absolutely, right?

Emma

And I think what you're saying there, Nicola, it's that thing of taking this away from kind of just being a kind of secular self improvement season is like really holding the focus this is, this is about how we grow closer to the Lord and how we grow closer to each other. See, like, you say, like, it's that's beautiful about sort of fasting for someone else in the same way, you know, we think about praying for someone else or interceding for someone that that we can offer that up and use that to grow in love for each other as well. I love that.

Nicola

So if you are listening to this and you're struggling with Lent, you know, get in touch with us and ask for some prayers. You know, I would love to pray for you this Lent. I'm sure we all would, you know, we'll be posting this on social media, but also feel free to email me at any time and just you know, and I can offer some of my fasting for you. That would be a real joy to do. That be wonderful. Has anybody got any, I suppose, encouraging examples of how fasting does improve our spiritual life?

Emma

I think for me, I mean, this is probably going back a little bit to the kind of self improvement thing, but I was thinking about, it's, it's a little bit like, it really helps kind of build that, sort of these muscles of like, self control and self discipline. I think, see the image I was thinking of is, you know, for people that, you know, go out and do exercise, or I was thinking about, of, like, when I used to dance growing up, that there's some. And then you just have to do something like repetitively, and you don't, kind of see that that thing is helping something like sprint training or something, when you're doing like, you know, running training or something, and it's, it's not that you see, like directly seeing the benefit from that particular activity in the moment, but it's knowing that that's building you up for something else, if that makes sense. So, yeah, so I think there's, there's something for me in the kind of where this puts my heart and where this kind of makes

me practice, you know, this makes me practice being self controlled. This makes me practice being, you know, patient. So, you know, when I can say no to I'm not going to have the biscuit. I can then say, No, I'm not going to kind of pass that, that nasty comment about someone, or I'm going to, you know, take a moment to be, to be patient about these things. So I'd say that's where fasting has kind of come into my spiritual life so far.

Nicola

And building these habits of holiness, it's like we build it up. Like, if you do, if you play a sport, you know, you get the muscle memory, don't you, and it's the same with virtue in our lives, you know, the right I often think, instead of, if you're struggling with something in particular, rather than trying really hard, you know, it can sometimes feel like impossible to get over that thing. So maybe if you struggle with gossip, for example, and it can be hard to break the habit. Instead, think about actually, how can I pay three compliments today, you know, and you focus on the virtue rather than the vice. And that can be a real way that I found is helpful to combat sin. No, not to commit sin. I did not mean to commit sin. To combat sin, is what I meant there, to combat sin. So instead of like thinking, oh, you know, I'm really rubbish at this, actually trying to get better at the opposite thing. And I think that little shift of perspective is quite helpful and a practical way for me to focus on the good instead of like what I'm really struggling with, right?

Emma

I think the other thing, kind of on the back of what you're saying, Nicola, is there's something about the kind of the delayed the sort of that that almost the delayed gratification, the kind of that not everything good has to feel good in the moment. See, like, I think often we think, you know, the spiritual life, and particularly in our faith, can just be about us feeling like warm and snuggly and close with God. But actually, sometimes it's hard, and sometimes we do just have to do things, just because we have to do them. And I think, you know, yes, it doesn't always feel like me not having that chocolate bar is going to do anything dramatic for my spiritual life, but it's sometimes just remembering that that I'm not doing this during my faith, I'm not living for God just because it makes me feel good. And not everything in life is about me, kind of feeling, feeling all happy and fuzzy inside.

Fr Phil

And for me, I think it turns us towards the Eucharist. So like, you know, the way that the Lord feeds us, like you know, he actually wants to feed us, yes, isn't that amazing? So,

you know, developing a sense of a hunger for the things of God leads us to a hunger for the Eucharist, absolutely in the fulfilment of that hungering. So it then sort of take changes our whole, like human existence, from having this, this, these needs that we're trying to fulfil on this kind of, you know, basic level, as it were, to actually need to be fulfilled in a heavenly way, and that's the Eucharist for us. So that can be a really powerful step on that spiritual journey.

Nicola

Yeah, and isn't it wonderful that the church just gives us what we need to, you know, you know, in this season of Lent as well, can we find another opportunity? Maybe it's we get to go to another mass, you know, in the week, if we normally just go on Sunday, maybe we can find one day in the week there might be an evening mass in a parish nearby. Doesn't even have to be yours. It could be the one nearby. Or, I know, something that we're doing is putting on an extra Holy Hour so that we can spend that time with the Lord in adoration, or even just, you know, making use of all the opportunities that there will be to go to Confession this Lent. You know, most parishes up there offering, if you like, of that sacrament, and the church just provides everything we need to grow in holiness during this season, which is a beautiful opportunity, but also just recognising that we are have to get on with our daily lives during Lent as well. You know, like nothing shuts down for us during Lent. And I remember a long time ago, a priest saying to me, you know, Nicola Jesus went to the desert for 40 days. You are not. You out at the time I was tea. Jenny's like, you're at this school and, you know? And actually, it's not a very desert like experience. And for a lot of us, our daily lives are not, you know, we're not taking ourselves off to become hermits for for 40 days in some lovely, you know, spiritual environment. We've got to get on with daily life, right?

Emma

But, um, I'm just what you're saying. And Nicola reminded me of something St Francis de Sales says when he's writing to kind of his secular friends, that actually, if you're in a secular job where you're looking after people, or you're kind of, you've got these responsibilities, your fast is kind of giving your full attention to that you don't need to be not eating or like, you know, if your fast is actually causing, causing, like detriment to that, that's not what God is calling you to. You know that there's something about how we pay attention and kind of be present to the things that are in front of us that we're kind of re encouraged towards during Lent and fasting isn't meant to kind of negate any of that. It's almost meant to kind of refocus us on that.

Nicola

Yes, like, if you're miserable without a cup of coffee on the morning and you're going to be nasty to everyone you meet, then it's probably not that fast for you. You know, right?

Emma

Exactly. I once tried, like, full on fasting when I was in a bit of a zealous stage earlier in my 20s, and I fainted at work, like I was, like, this isn't good. And, you know, that's, that's not what God wanted for me in that moment. You know,

Fr Phil

Wow, great stories, guys.

Nicola

Well, we really hope that this can be a source of encouragement for anyone listening. You know, we are not perfect. We are not you know, our lengths are not going to be smooth, a smooth ride. I would imagine there are going to be challenges that we will come back and chat about each week. But you know, we want to help each other through Lent that's the plan, and we really want to help you through it as well, that it will be an opportunity for, ultimately, for us, to grow in holiness. Because the one thing that I know for definite is that is what the Lord wants for us, that for each and every one of us, in a completely unique way, we're being invited to take an a step closer to the Lord and the church provides us these seasons where we can really intentionally think about and listen. You know, what is it that he is asking us to do? Because his plans are the ones that that work out, you know, not on, not on our own steam. So I would encourage you to if you haven't decided you know what your Lenten practice is going to be. Maybe just take some time today, this week, to pray about it and to try and listen to the Lord, to notice. What are the things? What are the areas in my life that are the causing me discomfort or making me uncomfortable? And what are the things that really bring me joy, that maybe the Lord is inviting me to step into more this Lent but also to think about that it's not just about an obligation, that it's something that is a real invitation from the Lord and and also, you know, let us know. Let us know how you're getting on. And if you're listening to this at some point during that first week in Lent and you think, Oh, I haven't even started yet. That is, don't worry about it. Just start now. Like there's, there's no kind of hard and fast rule that if you don't start your fast on Ash Wednesday, that's it. There's no point doing it. Each new morning is an opportunity. Each moment is an opportunity to begin again with the Lord can. He's so generous in his in the way that he'll

come to help us with that. So I just encourage you to think about it this week, what you're going to do, how you're going to draw closer to God this Lent and we'll be back next week to chat about how our lens going, and share with you the triumphs and the, you know, the sorrows that we are having and really to encourage each other to keep going. That is the main thing. So before we finish, I just going to invite Father Phil, just to lead us in a time of prayer, just to round our conversation off.

Fr Phil

I'll begin in the name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

So we pause just for a moment to recollect ourselves and recognise ourselves in the presence of God,

Father, we thank you for all that you are doing in our lives. Thank you for sending us your son Jesus Christ who shows us the pattern of our lives and the pattern on our Lent. May we accompany him through these days ahead, in prayer, in fasting, in almsgiving. Lord open our eyes to see your work in our lives. Send your light to enlighten us. Lord, may we be firm in the fact of discouragement may we heard your voice above all others. We make all of these prayers in the name of Jesus our lord. Amen.

In the name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Nicola (Outro)

Thank you for joining us. We hope today's conversation has inspired you to take another step in your own Lenten journey. We'd love to hear from you! Share your thoughts, or reflections with us on social media or contact us via email adultformation@rcdmidd.org.uk and let's keep each other in prayer as we Journey to Easter.