

Today's **THOUGHT FOR THE DAY** comes from the Revd John Murray (from Srasbourg of the Anglican Diocese in Europe) who is sharing our preparations for Easter. Welcome John!



Matthew 6.16-18

And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

This week's reflections are based on chapter 14 of the book *Holy Habits: Eating Together*.

So it's a bit ironic that today's biblical text is about *not* eating and about doing it in secret, *not* together.

I have to admit that for myself, as for many Christians in our society, the practice of fasting has become rather minimal, rather vestigial. It comes down to the familiar practice of "giving something up" for Lent.

Well, this Lent my wife and I have decided to give up alcohol. Now I don't want to give you the impression that we are budding alcoholics, but we do live in a wine village in France, our neighbours do produce excellent Alsace wines, and, yes, we do regularly enjoy a glass of wine with our lunch (which is usually the main meal in France). And I suppose that the lunchtime glass did become a bit *more* regular during all the months of lockdown.

There's nothing wrong with drinking wine: it's one of the joys of God's creation, and it even became the vehicle by which Jesus comes to be with us today whenever we celebrate holy communion. But it *is* good to remind ourselves that we can do without it. Especially in our consumer society where deliberately going without something is positively counter-cultural. Giving something up is a way of going on strike from consumerism.

Every Sunday is a feast day, the feast of the Resurrection, so even in Lent you are allowed to break your fast on a Sunday (do the maths: 40 days from Ash Wednesday to Easter only works out if you miss out the Sundays). So I was rather looking forward to a glass of wine at lunch after church last Sunday. Except that I felt a headache coming on, so the worst thing I could do would be drink alcohol. Just another of God's little jokes!

So we shall pursue our fast through this Lent; a rather trivial fast, I have to admit, but

worthwhile nonetheless. But don't worry: as Jesus says, we shall not be going round looking dismal, and we shall go on anointing our heads and washing our faces. So that it remains a secret between us and God.
Except that I suppose I have now ruined it by telling you all about it...

John Murray