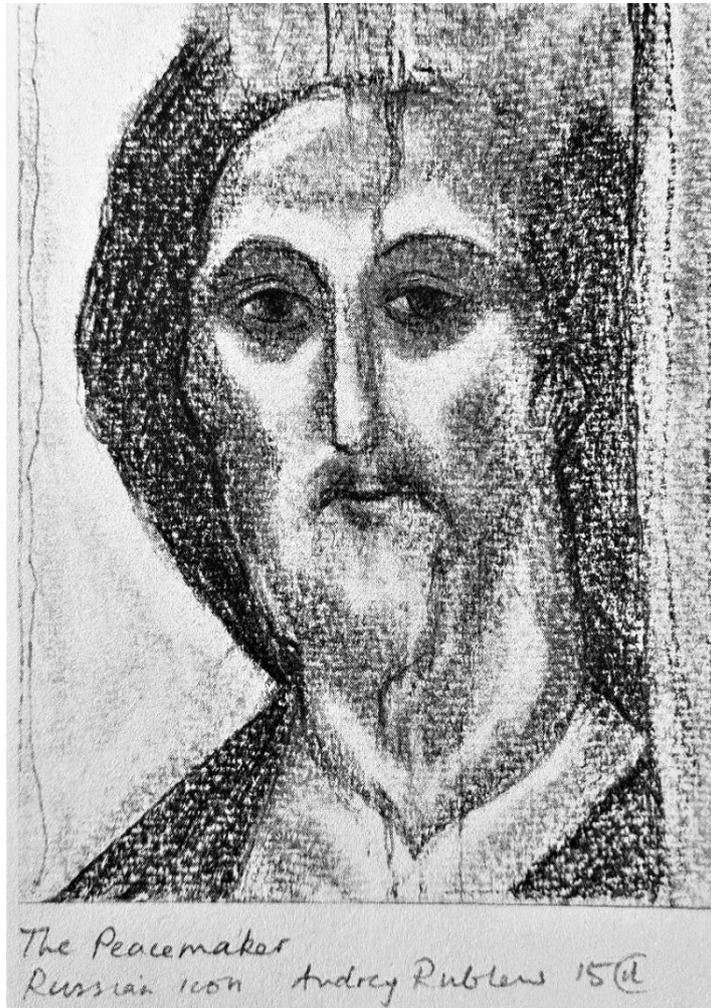


LYNDA WRIGHT

AN INTRODUCTION TO LENT



As we begin to leave behind the deepest, darkest days of winter and move towards Springtime we also enter the season of Lent.

Linguistically, Lent is derived from an old English word meaning springtime. In Latin, Lente, means slowly.

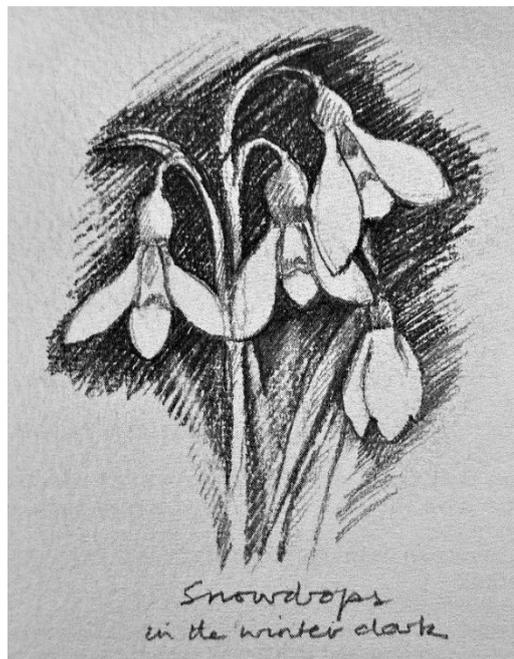
So Lent points to the coming of Spring and new life, and also invites us once again to slow down and take stock of our lives, and to ponder the slow emergence of new life all around.

As with Advent and Christmas, so too with Lent and Easter: to truly enter a feast there must first be a fast. Gerard Hughes in his Lenten book "Oh God Why?" describes Lent as traditionally a time for prayer, fasting, penance and

almsgiving. It began as a time of special preparation for new converts to the faith who were baptised on Holy Saturday. It also became a time for reconciliation for those Christians, who, in time of persecution had denied their faith or committed some other public crime, separating themselves from the Church. The ceremony of reconciliation took place on Maundy Thursday. So this liturgical season became a time of preparation for baptism and of reconciliation for public sinners, who began Lent by wearing ashes on their heads as a sign of repentance. Soon this practice spread to the whole church, and Lent became a collective retreat in daily life, a time for fasting and meeting our demons, a time for spiritual battle - just as Christ did in his forty days in the desert when he faced the devil's temptations.

During Lent we too are called to enter the desert, the desert inside each of us. Lent invites us to feel our smallness, to feel our vulnerability and fears, our insecurities and take time to focus on those things that are weighing down our ability to faithfully live as Christ has called us to live. 'Fasting' is not about what we 'give up' but what we are prepared to attend to, repent of, to change.

So in these weeks of late winter and early spring let us take time to notice the unfolding life all around us, the slow return of colour in nature and the tentative opening of buds, the stretching to the light of those things that have been hidden through the winter months.



Spend some time each day using your senses to enjoy the natural world - the changes that are beginning to happen, tiny movements towards the light and marvel at the mystery of returning life.

And let us also take time to move a little more slowly in order to be reflective, to be with those things that are uncomfortable in our lives, things which we experience in our own 'desert' that we too might grow into the renewing life of Easter - into our own resurrections and new life.