



So, my dear friends, you have always been obedient; your obedience must not be limited to times when I am present. Now that I am absent it must be more in evidence, so work out your salvation in fear and trembling. It is God who, for his own generous purpose, gives you the intention and the powers to act. Let your behaviour be free of murmuring and complaining so that you remain faultless and pure, unspoilt children of God surrounded by a deceitful and underhand brood, shining out among them like bright stars in the world, proffering to it the Word of life. Then I shall have reason to be proud on the Day of Christ, for it will not be for nothing that I have run the race and toiled so hard. Indeed, even if my blood has to be poured as a libation over your sacrifice and the offering of your faith, then I shall be glad and join in your rejoicing – and in the same way, you must be glad and join in my rejoicing.

Philippians 2:12 -18

... so that you remain faultless and pure, unspoilt children of God

3rd Sunday before Lent

These are the weeks in which we gear our minds towards the season of Lent. The season is a period of spiritual introspection, a time for examining our lives personally and as a community, measuring ourselves against gospel standards. This text puts a perspective on those standards as Paul conceived them to be.

In his relations with the churches he founded, Paul put considerable store upon their obedience to the standards he laid down for them. For him, those standards were God-given and not subject to challenge. This is a core issue within the Christian community in our own time. Do we live by rules and standards that require our unquestioning obedience? Or do we determine our ethical choices by the best wisdom we can draw upon, trusting in the guidance of the Spirit as John envisages in his gospel? Is it possible to embrace Paul's words, *It is God who, for his own generous purpose, gives you the intention and the powers to act*, to illuminate the interaction with the Spirit?

So the approach to Lent challenges us to think about what the ethical Christian life looks like and how we may go about putting it into practice.