Lent

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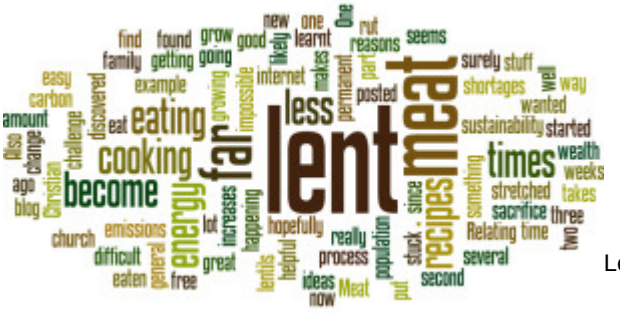

Lent has crept up on us all this year perhaps since it is so early (can we please have a fixed date for Easter). My lent guide book started talking about food. Its a little known fact that the medieval church tried to limit meat consumption, not just in lent but all the year round. In feudal Europe the church attempted to direct both when and what people could eat. Consumption of meat was forbidden for about at least a third of the year for one reason or another. Meat free days were to remember various saints or the virgin Mary (all Saturdays). There were also periods of fasting throughout the year, 4 days at the start of each season than advent and lent. Some people say a particularly devout person would have spent 8 months of the year being vegetarian. Fish was not completely banned and this led to those with money fish farming. Fish farming perhaps is not the right word but the local lords of the manor in the town where my parents lived got permission from the King to dam streams in the royal hunting ground and they stocked these pools with fish. These rules also seemed not apply to the monastic system at one monastery near London in the late middle ages historians have worked out the calorie intake was 5000kcal/day (recommended intake 2000kcal/day). Much of this was meat. What does this teach us? It easy to sacrifice something or give something up for the wrong reasons. You do wonder whether the church did ban meat entirely due to religion. Providing enough meat for everyone would have been a challenge for medieval farming. However the medieval peasant diet was very low in protein (the rich probably ignored the rules). For us giving up something for lent can have mixed motives but still can be useful. What is more useful is if that change carries on beyond lent. To help you this blog has a No oil in the lamp lent guide. Neil

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