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Dear friends,

As we progress through the season of Lent, I hope that many of you are following the daily readings in the booklet of mediations produced by the local Churches Together. We all know that our lives are a journey. This journey has within it a spiritual element, for as we grow older so we become more aware of the reality that our earthly life is finite. Asking those big questions is a significant part of the spiritual journey. But we live in an age that appears to give equal value to all of the answers. We like to 'pick and mix' our spirituality in the same way that we choose our shopping in Budgens or the Co Op. Using the booklet of meditations gives an unexpected uniformity for forty days. Many people will all be reading the same passage from the Bible and thinking about the reflection written by one of the local ministers and then meditating on the meaning and application in their life. For the reality is that, whilst picking and mixing from all kinds of sources, if we ignore the words of the Gospels then it is rather like buying interesting nibbles and forgetting the main course. Any dietician will tell you that is bad for your health. In the same way, ignoring studying the Bible and in particular the Gospels, is bad for our spiritual health. We all progress through our journey of life. It is possible to make very little progress spiritually. How are you doing?

Spring time brings with it the glories of so many bulbs bursting into life. The people who live in Green Street are to be congratulated for the way they have planted daffodil bulbs along the sides of the road. It is simply stunning to drive along there when all the flowers are in bloom. You cannot help but smile and have your heart gladdened. The dark days of winter are behind us and we look forward to the new life of Spring.

During the assembly I took on Ash Wednesday in Ingatestone and Fryerning Junior School, I talked about daffodils, showing a picture of fields of daffodils. I contrasted this with a daffodil bulb

before it is planted in the ground, when it shrivelled up and apparently lifeless. It really is a miracle that something that looks dead can burst forth into such splendour. The Easter message is that we are all like that daffodil bulb. We all have the potential to be full of exuberant new life. God has made us that way. Do we want to spend our lives like the bulb that has not begun to grow, or to fulfil our potential, like the flower?

That is the message of the resurrection. The impossible had happened, Jesus had come back to life. Because he has conquered death, we can face the reality of our own. That requires considerable spiritual maturity, something that some people would find almost impossible to undertake. Elsewhere in this magazine are published a guideline I have written on items to consider when planning a funeral service, and a form to fill in and give to me. Further copies are available from the Rectory. I would be happy to arrange a time for anyone to come and see me and spend an hour talking through these forms. Sue is also available to undertake this with anyone. Recent incidents, still hurting in our hearts, remind us that we would do well to give this serious consideration. These forms will now be constantly available, so it is not something that has to be done straight away. However, if it is put off, will it always be put off?

On Ash Wednesday I went from my weekly assembly to my monthly service in Ard Tulley. Both are enjoyable experiences. Put together, they give an instant reality to length of human life, if we are blessed enough to live into old age. The passing years should bring to us a sense of maturity and reflection on life. Those in Ard Tulley have a wealth of experience. It is good that we take the children from the Junior school on visits down to see them. For the whole of human life is a great gift from God. When we see the church family together, from babies through to those of very mature years, we see the world as God intended it. For we can all learn from each other. From youth we can recapture enthusiasm and wonder, and from maturity learn serenity. We know our life is a journey. Easter reminds us who we should have as our companion along the way.

Yours in Christ, *Patrick.*