

## EDITORIAL

‘**W**HAT are you giving up for Lent?’ In Catholic circles it can be a mechanical question, and a mechanical practice. Hence the emphasis, as old as the time of the Hebrew prophets, on the change of heart which our action must express. ‘Rend your hearts and not your garments’, says God to us through Joel, and in the surprisingly radical opening of Isaiah’s prophecy, ‘What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams . . . seek justice, correct oppression; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow.’ Israel on the whole (as we today) preferred less exacting forms of Catholic action. Perhaps time is the thing it costs most to give up: yet what better than to give it up this Lent in the traditional visiting of those in hospital or prison, or who have just come out of prison, the old, a little bored in their new geriatric centre, perhaps a little boring. . . . The country can be proud of the welfare state it has built up over the last twenty years, for it is a realization of justice; but in the nature of things it can never dispense us from the charity which our Lord exercises through each of his members. We cannot assume that everything is being done for those in need by the state. ‘If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food’, St James tells us, ‘and one of you says to them “Go in peace, be warmed and filled”, without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit?’

Many of us, of course, cannot spare the time to act in this way. But even so our Lenten sacrifices must not be an empty gesture. The money we save when we give something up could well go towards helping others to do the work we cannot. An excellent suggestion was recently made by the secretary of *Pax*, that funds could be raised for sending someone to work in an under-developed country with the money saved by ‘skipping a meal’ each week. (Details from the *Pax* Special Fund, c/o 57 Ladbrooke Road, London, W.11.) That is an all-year plan, but what better time than Lent for making a start? In any case it gives us a model for what is wanted; a positive and practical centre to our self-denial.