

Most of my life as a priest has been in the Diocese of Chichester, so it's hardly surprising that I have a particular devotion to St Richard, who was Bishop of Chichester in the middle of the thirteenth century. Richard was important for many reasons, but is probably best known nowadays for his famous prayer, although not all of it probably goes back to Richard himself. There are various versions, one of which appeared in the musical *Godspell*. The most usual form however goes like this:

*Thanks be to Thee, my Lord Jesus Christ  
For all the benefits Thou hast given me,  
For all the pains and insults Thou hast borne for me.  
O most merciful Redeemer, friend and brother,  
May I know Thee more clearly,  
Love Thee more dearly,  
Follow Thee more nearly*

Learning to know, love and follow Jesus better is what Lent is all about, so this prayer, and especially its last three lines, could be a useful guide and companion as we prepare for Easter.

*May I know Thee more clearly,  
Love Thee more dearly,  
Follow Thee more nearly*

This threefold petition has the great advantage of having something for everyone, for every different kind of temperament and personality.

Some people find the idea of following Jesus most appealing, as it encourages them to think about how to live out their faith in action, by trying to serve others better and by acts of generosity. Other people are of a more curious mindset, they want to know more who Jesus is and understand him better. Others are simply overwhelmed by their sense of God's love and their own longing for God.

By whichever our preferred approach, in the end we all need all three and so it is a rather pointless exercise to ask which is most important.

The last part of St Richard's prayer echoed a prayer that had already been traditional for centuries before his time:

*Eternal God,  
the light of the minds that know thee,  
the joy of the hearts that love thee,  
the strength of the wills that serve thee;  
grant us so to know thee that we may truly love thee,  
so to love thee that we may freely serve thee,  
to the glory of thy holy name.*

The petition "grant us so to know thee that we may truly love thee, so to love thee that we may freely serve thee" is exactly what St Richard's prayer is getting at, and in exactly the same order. None of it is accidental. To serve God, we must love him - or our service

would be mere slavish obedience. But to love God, we must know him - or our love would be mere emotion.

So a good aim for Lent is to *know Jesus more clearly, love him more dearly and follow him more nearly*