

Archbishop Stephen gave a short reflection on BBC Radio Humberside for the First Sunday of Lent

A few years ago I walked what is known as the Camino – The Way - to Santiago de Compostela in Spain taking the northern route. I started in Santander and walked about 700 km.

It took about a month. I learnt a lot about taking things on and giving things up. And this feels relevant for the first Sunday of lent.

First of all, I was out of my comfort zone. I didn't know where I was going to sleep each night. I was reliant on the hospitality of strangers. I couldn't speak the language. I don't have an inner satnav. I often got lost.

And I had to travel light.

Which meant giving things up. And, amazingly, even though I took hardly anything with me, after a day or two, I still discovered I had too much.

This was a revelation. How little we actually need.

Which brings me back to Lent.

We don't give things up because God likes it if we go without.

Nor is it meant to be a second chance to reboot those new year resolutions you failed to keep.

The Christian fast of Lent is about learning what we need, and what we don't need. We give things up, not because they are bad for us, but often because they are so good and lovely, and by learning to be less reliant on them or - for those of us, who have wealth and agency - taking them for granted, we can return to them when Lent is over with a renewed appreciation.

For Lent is about getting ready for Easter.

And Easter is about death and resurrection.

And one day, each of us will have to give up life itself and it is only in the dying and rising of Jesus, that we can find any hope at all.

So fasting is a spiritual business. And Lent is a journey. And on the journey, by giving things up and taking new things on, we learn how to travel with Jesus, who is both a companion on the road and the one into whose home we will finally be welcomed.