

The first blackbird has spoken, heard on emerging from Matins this morning, and signals an end to our winter of sin. Its tentative, and icy blasts of temptation may yet come, but it's a beginning, and gradually, and faithfully, the dawn chorus will swell in strength as yet more songsters join in. Already, we have robin, dunnoek and wren, song thrush and mistle thrush, great tit, coal tit and blue tit and, yesterday, chaffinch and yellow hammer, for the first time, not to mention the perennial wood pigeon and stock dove; some, like the blackbird, just getting in a bit of practice but others already in full song. And so we progress to Easter when our early morning vigil mass coincides with sunrise and the chorus of birds joins us in full song.

We call this time, Lent – Spring is its meaning in Dutch: a time to reflect on the lessons of winter, on the discontent which brings dis-ease. This, too, is perennial but an opportunity to ask ourselves what is it we truly want? what brings true content? who is the balm for our heated passions?

And if we can use this time well, to slow down, savour God's word, follow his peace, then the sound of the turtle dove may once again be heard in our land; that ever so gentle and easily lost sound that tells us that God is truly with us and welcomes us to a land of full light and clear conscience.

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