

Ash Wednesday
Wednesday, 17 February 2021
Day of Fast and Abstinence



In England and Wales

Cycle of Prayer — Candidates for the Sacraments

Keynote: Remember you are dust! Repent and believe the Good News!

Prophet Joel 2: 12-18

The whole community, the elders, the young, even the mothers with infants at the breast, are invited to join in the fast, and recognising the error of their ways, to repent, to experience a change of heart, and return to the ways of God, confident that God is full of compassion and tenderness, and always ready to forgive. *'It is the Lord who speaks — come back to me with all your heart, fasting, weeping, mourning.'* So the call goes out to call the people together: *'Order a fast, proclaim a solemn assembly... summon the community, assemble the elders, gather the children...'* and there before the altar let them pray *'Spare your people, Lord!'*

Responsorial Psalm 50 (51) — A song of repentance and prayer of contrition

Second Letter of Paul to the Corinthians 5: 20- 6:2

Paul reminds his readers, that there is no time like the present, he says *'Now is the favourable time; this is the day of salvation.'* Just as Christ was sent by God to bring healing and reconciliation to a world disrupted by sin, so too we are ambassadors for Christ. Our task then is to seek forgiveness for ourselves and to seek to bring others to reconciliation with us, and thus to friendship with God. *'As his fellow workers,'* says Paul *'we beg you once again not to neglect the grace of God that you have received.'*

Gospel according to Matthew 6: 1-6, 16-18

Prayer, Fasting and Almsgiving are the traditional practices of the season of Lent. We need to be aware of the danger of pride in trumpeting our own good works, of doing things for the wrong motive.

Prayer is seen as a sincere personal communion with God, a listening process, one of thanksgiving rather than one of petition. *'But when you pray,'* says Jesus *'go to your private room and, when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in that secret place.'*

Fasting, or the practice of self-denial is to be directed at God, and may be a positive means of bringing more self-discipline and order into our own lives, and of doing good service or acts of kindness for others. *'When you fast,'* says Jesus *'do not put on a gloomy look as the hypocrites do.'*

Almsgiving may take the form of giving more time, money or effort into caring or providing for the poor or infirm. The practices of 'giving things up for Lent' can be a very positive identification with Christ who is to be found in the faces of the poor. But just 'giving up for Lent' can be something negative, and finding a positive expression to almsgiving may be more in line with what is needed. Jesus says, *'Be careful not to parade your good deeds to attract notice; by doing this you will lose all reward from your Father in heaven... but when you give alms, your left hand must not know what your right hand is doing — your almsgiving must be in secret, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you.'*