

# Daily Reflections



Ash Wednesday 14 February 2018  
(Year B)

To

Saturday 17 February 2018

## Ash Wednesday

Scripture: Joel 2:12-18; Psalm 50; 2 Corinthians 5:20 - 6:2; Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

Jesus said, *'Your Father who sees in secret will reward you.'*

Jesus says this three times – and it is clearly important to him that people do not pray, fast or give alms to be noticed but also knows that they need to be reassured that God knows they are doing it. None of us really likes the idea of putting ourselves out and nobody noticing. During Lent, you will have numerous opportunities to do little things that no-one but you or God will know about. When you find yourself with choices – particularly around about the fourth week of Lent when the novelty of Lent resolutions will have worn off – try to remember Jesus' words. It isn't about God rewarding you necessarily but nice to know that God shares your secret!

- How much difference does it make whether God knows that you have prayed, fasted or given alms?
- How will you organise your prayer – fasting – almsgiving – so that you can keep it going when it gets tedious or feels not to be worthwhile anymore?

The first few days of Lent give us time to gear up – especially important in a year when Lent is early and we are barely over Christmastime and Candlemas. You might like to get a notebook to keep a journal this Lent – noting down reflections each day (writing or sketching). You might also use it to record your small, *'unnoticed'* gifts to God in terms of your prayer, fasting and almsgiving – as your journal is private this is not parading them but keeping them as your treasures of Lent 2018.

## Thursday after Ash Wednesday

Scripture: Deuteronomy 30:15-20; Psalm 1; Luke 9:22-25

Jesus said them all, *'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me...'*

Jesus has started to tell the disciples about the suffering that lies ahead for himself but also wants his disciples to understand that they will be following a similar path. This was contrary to what many Jewish people believed at the time – and some Christians say in our own day. They held that God would abundantly reward those in

his favour and that any suffering was a consequence of people's own sinfulness. Jesus' view is quite different. He is completely sinless and yet will live through great suffering. This means that we should not be surprised when suffering comes our way – but learn to align it with that of Jesus.

- Why does Jesus emphasise that suffering will be part of his follower's lives?
- How might this give meaning to any difficulties that come your way?

Spend time today thinking about suffering in your own life and in the lives of others. If you are in the midst of a period of pain or struggle, bring it into a time of prayer – asking the Lord to show you that you are walking in his footsteps and to give you a sense of his guidance and concern for you as you follow this path.

## Friday after Ash Wednesday

Scripture: Isaiah 58:1-9; Psalm 50; Matthew 9:14-15

*Jesus said, 'The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.'*

We are living in the days when the bridegroom – Jesus – is not physically present in our world. When he returns, we will celebrate – and Sundays (especially Easter) and feast days give us a foretaste of that. During Lent, we make time to reflect on this 'absence' and the human condition. Fasting – or denying ourselves certain things – can help us to focus on this emptiness – this gap in our lives. It can take courage to face this – it is easier to ignore it or run away from it. By doing it together during Lent, we give each other moral and spiritual support to face this aspect of being human.

- When have you been aware of a sense of emptiness – of something important that is missing in your life?
- How will you fast or deny yourself something to help you tune into this feeling and bring new depth into your spiritual life?

Think today about what you might fast from – or deny yourself – to echo the spiritual emptiness many of us feel. This is penitential – but not punitive. It is about helping ourselves to acknowledge our imperfections and to place them into God's mercy. If you are keeping a journal, make a note of what you intend to do (or not do). Write a simple prayer asking the Lord's blessing on your fast or self-denial.

## Saturday after Ash Wednesday

Scripture: Isaiah 58:9-14; Psalm 85; Luke 5:27-32

The Pharisees and their scribes were complaining to Jesus' disciples, saying, *'Why do you eat and drink with tax-collectors and sinners?'* Jesus answered, *'those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance.'*

For the Pharisees and other people of their day, sin was a bit like leprosy – by mixing with sinners you could be contaminated or infect yourself. They kept themselves apart to ensure that they maintained their purity and righteousness in the sight of God. This made Jesus' behaviour all the more strange. He was clearly a good man but seemed to put himself in the way of *'infection'*. Like a good doctor, Jesus goes to those who are sick – spends time with them – and helps to make them whole.

- How does Jesus life and work resemble that of a doctor?
- How does a doctor keep him or herself safe when tending the sick? And how might that apply to those working with people who are spiritually sick?

Spend time today praying for medical doctors – especially those who risk their own health to save the lives of others. Pray also for the protection of those who work with the spiritually and emotionally sick. If you are involved in this work, ask the Lord to bless you and keep you as you continue his ministry to the world.