
9 Wednesday

ASH WEDNESDAY

Joel 2: 12-18
Ps 51: 3-6, 12-14, 17
2Cor 5:20 – 6:2
Matt 6: 1-6, 16-18

It's back to basic, simple things that are important. It's Lent, time for renewal, repentance, refreshing of faith and practice as we journey towards celebrating our Easter.

Lent each year starts with Jesus' instructions about how to pray, to fast and to give alms. He was talking about everyday life. In His view, these seem normal, ordinary things we do all the time, 'natural' duties or services common to all forms of religious behaviour or practice. Not just things "to do" for Lent. In any case, there was no such thing as "Lent" in His day, nor for long afterwards.

Of those three practices, we mostly focus on prayer. Hundreds of books and courses and guidelines and instructions are available about how to pray, and we've always more to learn. But how do we learn about giving alms, practicing charity, fasting? Our church today (unlike, say, some 50 years ago) is hardly notable for expecting or helping us to fast, or the promotion of fasting.

But it could be said that, in our present world with its needs and problems, fasting is something more urgent and necessary, globally and personally for each of us. For we've become so carelessly and selfishly wasteful of the world's resources, God's gifts to us all.

What's special about Jesus' instructions is His insistence that almsgiving, prayer and fasting be done in secret, before the eyes only of our heavenly Father, not in any way allowing (much less seeking) other peoples' admiration or approval. Sincerity of heart, integrity, intimacy with our Father as we grow in love for Him --- this alone is why we pray, fast, give alms, keep our Lent.

Text wordcount: 278