

2020 February 26

*Ash Wednesday*

**Readings:**

*First: Joel 2.12-18, "Rent your hearts and not your clothing." (13a)*

*Psalm 51, "Restore to me the joy of your salvation." (12a)*

*Second: 2 Corinthians 5.20-6.2, "See, now is the acceptable time, see." (6.2b)*

*Gospel: Matthew 6.1-6, 16-18, "Your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you." (4b)*

*Renewal in mercy*

Lent is the time of deep introspection, reflection, and turning away from our bad habits of forgetfulness, ingratitude or neglect of God and his commandments, failure to worship him properly, and not caring for our fellow beings. Prophet Joel makes a call to the priests and ministers of the Lord to approach the Lord with a contrite heart and pray, *"Spare your people, O Lord, and do not make your heritage a mockery, a byword among the nations. Why should it be said among the peoples, 'Where is their God?'"* (Joel 2.17)

These prophetic words are equally relevant today as in his times. We in these days are more in need of God's mercy so that we the heritage of God may not become a mockery in the eyes of the people of this world and of our times. There are many around us who want to celebrate the disappearance or absence of God from our midst. They try their level best to remove God's presence and his name from the public places and discussions. That much enmity to God and his people has become most fashionable in our time. Those of us who are aware of it must listen to the call of Prophet Joel to pray in the above words.

The words of the psalm today must be in our heart and on our lips every now and then, *"Have mercy, O Lord, for we have sinned."* (Psalm 51.12a) That is the reality of our life. Along with St. Paul we too must consider ourselves as *"Ambassadors for Christ"*, to plead for the cause of our own sin and those of the above section of humanity, which tries to erase the name of God from the face of the earth. This is because we are the ones who accepted the Grace of God. This Grace invites and empowers us to plead for others who are in danger of losing that Grace.

Our stepping into this season of repentance, repair and reconciliation with our own self, with our fellow beings and finally with God begins by anointing ourselves with ashes, which reminds us that we are dust and ashes and destined to return to dust. Along with this act of humbling ourselves, Jesus instructs to pray properly, fast sincerely, and to care earnestly for the deprived and forsaken ones, and we must do these acts for the seeing only of the Father who is in secret. Getting into the secret account of God alone matters, and no other account is of any significant value. Lent should remind us this teaching of Jesus, enlighten us in our reflections, and enable us to respond to Jesus.

Fr. George