

2021 February 18

Ash Wednesday

Reading:

First Reading: Joel 2.12-18 "Blow the trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly."

The Psalm 51 "Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight."

Second Reading: 2 Corinthians 5.20-6.2 "We entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled with God."

The Gospel: Matthew 6.1-6, 16-18 "When you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing."

Calling out!

In today's reading we find different types of calls. Prophet Joel, after narrating various events of God punishing his people, leading them back to repentance, repair, and also to rejoice. He brings to their attention the graciousness of God, who is slow to anger and abounding in mercy. People are prompted even to 'provoke' God, reminding him of his great deeds of mercy and favor in the past. The psalm is a call of the repentant and brokenhearted sinner seeking God for the same abounding mercy. The sinner becomes aware of his sinfulness. St. Paul, as an ambassador for Christ, calls upon the people to be reconciled to God. The reason or motive for this reconciliation is God's making Christ sin for our sake. That is, Christ 'became sin' in order that we may be freed from our sinfulness.

Jesus is inviting us in the gospel to the vision of the Father who watches over us and knows everything including our inner thoughts, desires, and motivations. The Father's watchfulness is to reward us. The condition for rewards from the Father is that, just as the Father sees everything in secret we need to do every good deed only for the seeing of the Father and not anyone else. Because of our sinfulness our desire is to get praise, acclaim, and appreciation. If with such motivation we do good deeds like praying, fasting, and alms-giving, our rewards are likely to be short-lived and limited, and not from God. When we do these only for the seeing by God, our rewards coming from God are likely to be rich, plentiful, and everlasting.

Today officially we begin Lent and this process of returning back to the source, to God, to our brothers and sisters and to our own selves. The ashes remind us of our sinfulness, our need for repentance and humbling ourselves before God, our need for God, our need for each other, and the need for recouping and reintegration of our own self. It reminds us of the abounding mercy of God. Repentance leads us to reconciliation. Reconciliation with our own sinful past, reconciliation and repair to our broken relationships with our brothers and sisters, and eventually and as a consequence, reconciliations and return to our God.

Thus, the cycle of reconciliation must touch three elements, first our neighbours who include our family, close and distant relatives, co-workers, and all to whom we are related in our life and work. This reconciliation will take us to reconcile with our own self; all our feelings of revenge, retribution, greed, avarice, etc., are gone, and we become at peace with ourselves. The above two reconciliations will lead us automatically to God, with whom we are already reconciled because of the above. God is the prime mover in this process. Reconciliations will remind us of the need for prayer, fasting and penance to keep us reconciled continually, and ultimately remind us of the needs of our fellow beings, caring for whom is also in the scheme of God and his care for all through human instrumentality, through us.

Fr. George

(The readings of the day are given at the beginning. The numbers in parentheses refer to the quotes from them. Good to go through the readings beforehand to properly understand the Reflections)

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