

## **Readings and Sermons for Ash Wednesday**

**22<sup>nd</sup> Feb 2012**

### **Readings**

#### **2 Corinthians 5:20-6:10**

So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. For he says, 'At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you.'

See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation! We are putting no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labours, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; in honour and dishonour, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see—we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

#### **Matthew 6:1-6**

'Beware of practising your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

'So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

'And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

'And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

**Rev'd Canon Simon Moor – Midday and Evening Ashing and Eucharist**

Lent to some seems to be a massive mountain that is too large to walk around and too high to climb. Expectation of a Holy Lent- as shown by the observances of previous generations and the ancients in particular make the start of Lent daunting to me. More daunting still, how do we entreat people to observe such a mountain in a sensible and realistic way? Particularly in the light of Paul's message to the Corinthians: "We are putting no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry."

I am reminded of a 'Time Management' course I attended years ago. I remember clearly we talked a lot about monkeys and elephants. For Ash Wednesday I wish to focus on the elephants.

'Ignoring or acknowledging the elephant in the room' and to begin with a question, 'How do you eat an elephant?' The answer is 'a bit by bit' or indeed 'a mouthful at a time.'

The church's expectation of its adherents is often quite massive. In its entirety a fullest Lenten observance is hard to contemplate. Taking our lead from Jesus in the wilderness and in the introduction to the Ash Wednesday liturgy a 'full and holy' Lent should be a time of:

Prayer – communicating with God. Our conversations should include a balance of: **A**doration (praise), **C**onfession, **T**hanksgiving and **S**upplication (Asking prayers). Time to focus on our relationships with Christ and all who are in his likeness

Fasting and Self Denial – the giving up to test our mettle and resolve.

Reading and Meditating – the study of scripture and other material that may aid our development.

Self-examination and repentance – in how we act and operate in our day to day lives.

The eating of an elephant is that we should look to something within this wide scope – doing something to make us more whole and more ready to face the consequences of Holy Week and Easter.

You will often hear me speak about the 'giving up' or 'taking on' debate. This is where the 'elephant in the room' comes in. we are not to ignore the beast, but acknowledge it, take a nibble, but not necessarily make it all important or all consuming.

Taking the lead from the Gospel reading for today; people who bang on about what they have given up for Lent – chocolate or alcohol or Eastenders – never is that impressive – a friend of mine gives up cabbage! Not impressive at all! What is impressive is fasting, giving up, and giving alms, prayer or study that is done in secret. The same message can be repeated: 'Do not let your right hand know what your left is doing!'

Perhaps the key to Lent Observance is purely about our relationship with God, and outflowing from this is then - how we act, react and interact with other and indeed ourselves.

Therefore give up something – but don't go on about it! And in the quiet room of your life take up something; study something prayerfully – be it a novel, a paper or even a magazine, watch TV, a documentary or even a situation in a soap; take what you learn into your prayer – were you elated disturbed, saddened or overjoyed. How do such thoughts help you to contemplate your journey alongside Jesus and how you relate to other?

These disciplines (note the link to disciples) are the 'bit by bit' approach that all may manage.

What do you resolve to start today? What does your self-examination lead you towards?