

St Columba Newsletter 16th February 2021.

I ate my pancakes yesterday; a part of a long tradition of using up ingredients before the lantern fast. This tells me it must be Ash Wednesday today. I wondered to myself why I don't seem to make pancakes at any other time. Maybe you do? As Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent I thought I would get the newsletter out early this week. It is a great time to take stock and reflect upon our lives. However I feel we have already given up a lot over the past year so why not have a think about what you can "put on" that is edifying and useful instead? When we think of Jesus going into the wilderness he did so as a preparation for ministry and this involved a fast. However it wasn't just about what he gave up. It was also about spending time with his heavenly Father and getting on his wave length. So why not think this lent about doing something? This could be something to take care of our spiritual life that you haven't done before and perhaps have been meaning to do?

Here are the readings....

Psalm 51

For the director of music. A psalm of David. When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.

- ¹ Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.
- ² Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.
- ³ For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me.
- ⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight;
so you are right in your verdict
and justified when you judge.

- ⁵ Surely I was sinful at birth,
sinful from the time my mother conceived me.
- ⁶ Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb;
you taught me wisdom in that secret place.
- ⁷ Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.
- ⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.
- ⁹ Hide your face from my sins
and blot out all my iniquity.
- ¹⁰ Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
- ¹¹ Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.
- ¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.
to build up the walls of Jerusalem.
- ¹³ Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
so that sinners will turn back to you.
- ¹⁴ Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God,
you who are God my Saviour,
and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.
- ¹⁵ Open my lips, Lord,
and my mouth will declare your praise.
- ¹⁶ You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it;
you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.
- ¹⁷ My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart
you, God, will not despise.
- ¹⁸ May it please you to prosper Zion,
to build up the walls of Jerusalem.

Matthew 6.1-6.

Giving to the Needy

6 "Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

2 "So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honoured by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. **3** But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, **4** so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Prayer

5 "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. **6** But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Matthew 6:16-21

Fasting

16 "When you fast, do not look sombre as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. **17** But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, **18** so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Treasures in Heaven

19 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. **20** But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. **21** For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Comment.

I have always found these passages difficult to preach on, though both readings are quite direct and easy to interpret. The problem is that the gospel reading will immediately condemn me if I give you any personal examples!

The reading from the psalm is David's confession to God after he was caught in the act of adultery. The words have been used as a confession in different forms ever since. Jesus teaching in Matthew is part of the Sermon on the Mount. This is found in Matthew chapters 5-7 and well worth a read if you are not familiar with it and well worth a read if you are familiar with it!

Jesus words about treasure in heaven are worth thinking about. It rather runs counter cultural to our society today. One thing that our world never seems to understand is that the abundance of possessions never satisfies. If this were true, all the wealthiest people would be the happiest! I think we know that the world does not work that way. He certainly seems to know what he is talking about. Jesus put it another way. As the Apostle Paul put it "Godliness with contentment is great gain." (1 Timothy 6.6) In the parable of the Rich Fool, Jesus puts it like this "...life does not consist in the abundance of your possessions." (Luke 12.15)

Where does your treasure lie?

The collect for Ash Wednesday.

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who hate nothing that you have made, and forgives the sins of all them that are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins, and acknowledging our wretchedness, may receive from you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Wishing you every blessing,

Take care,
James Howson
17 February 2021