

## Readings, Reflections and Prayers for the Lent Season 2022

(Thursday afternoons at 3 pm on Zoom, 3 February to 14 March inclusive)

### Thursday after Ash Wednesday

#### **Collect for Ash Wednesday**

Almighty and everlasting God, who hatest nothing that thou hast made, and dost forgive 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 obtain of thee, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen



#### **The Epistle for Ash Wednesday, Joel 2:12-17**

Yet even now, says the Lord,  
return to me with all your heart,  
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;  
rend your hearts and not your clothing.  
Return to the Lord, your God,  
for he is gracious and merciful,  
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love,  
and relents from punishing.  
Who knows whether he will not turn and relent,  
and leave a blessing behind him,  
a grain-offering and a drink-offering  
for the Lord, your God?

Blow the trumpet in Zion;  
sanctify a fast;  
call a solemn assembly;  
gather the people.  
Sanctify the congregation;  
assemble the aged;  
gather the children,  
even infants at the breast.  
Let the bridegroom leave his room,  
and the bride her canopy.

Between the vestibule and the altar  
let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep.  
Let them say, '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?"'

### **Ronald Blythe, Ash Wednesday - T.S. Eliot**

'Ash Wednesday already!' says the old choir leader when I give her the hymns. 'The year races. When I was a girl a week took its time.' The three parishes will be together in Little Horksley in the church which rose from the ashes of an air raid and I shall kneel on the fractured tomb of a gentleman who died in the spring of 1666. His arms show a dove with 'an olive leaf plucked off'. On Saturday I shall lay dear Micky's ashes in the rain-soft earth by the wall. How efficiently and swiftly we 'come to dust' in the late twentieth century. How the symbols of violence and peace pace our history. I shall read from Joel, a favourite author of mine - his magnificent, 'Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the people...'

Reading T.S. Eliot's *Ash Wednesday*, I am reminded of Barbara Pym sending me fragments of her delightful diary on postcards from her hospital bed. She said that her church's chief claim to fame was that Eliot was received in to the Church of England there on 29 June 1927. Finstock, Oxfordshire. It was there that she worshipped, devoutly and amusedly, in what one visitor called 'a tattered hamlet'. It was there that T.S.Eliot came for baptism. And it is in such unprepossessing spots up and down the country that the Faith takes root, the Faith which flowers everlastingly in poetry and philosophy, in historic associations and private discovery. The Gospel for Ash Wednesday contradicts Joel's orders. Do not parade your ashes. Fast in secret. And remember that the moth and rust must eventually reduce all that you have to dust. A dancing dust, judging by the motes caught in the early March sun which streams through my room.

Eliot published his *Ash Wednesday* in 1930 all unknowingly at the beginning of a decade in which politics would consign the Lord's own nation to the ash-pit. Lenten imagery from the grim Communion service and the Bible flickers through it. 'Turn thou us, O good Lord, and so we shall be turned' the congregation begs at the end of the Communion. The poet says:

Because I do not hope to turn again  
Let these words answer  
For what is done, not to be done again  
May the judgement not be too heavy on us.

After Ash Wednesday, the weekly house-communions at the farms, the (let us hope) drying up of the sodden fields, the pencil greening of the willows, the nesting of the birds. Nothing dusty. Quite the opposite. In the poem the birds sing, 'Redeem the time, redeem the dream.'

**Robert Herrick , 1591-1674, *To keep a true Lent***

Is this a Fast, to keep  
the Larder leane  
and cleane  
from fat of Veales and Sheep?

Is it to quit the dish  
of Flesh, yet still  
to fill  
the platter high with Fish?

Is it to faste an houre,  
or ragged to go,  
or show  
a downcast look, and sowre?

No: 'tis a Fast, to dole  
thy sheaf of wheat  
and meat  
unto a hungry Soule.

It is to fast from strife.  
from old debate,  
and hate;  
to circumsise thy life.

To shew a heart grief-rent;  
to starve thy sin  
not Bin;  
and that's to keep thy Lent.

## St Augustine

Two works of mercy set a man free: forgive and you will be forgiven, and give and you will receive.

When we pray we are all beggars before God: we stand before the great householder bowed down and weeping, hoping to be given something; and that something is God himself.

What does a poor man beg from you? Bread. What do you beg from God? - Christ, who said, 'I am the living bread which came down from heaven.'

Do you really want to be forgiven? Then forgive. Do you hope to receive something? Then give to another. And if you want your prayer to fly up to God, give it two wings, fasting and almsgiving.

But look carefully at what you do: don't think it is enough to fast if it is only penance for sin, and does not benefit someone else. You deprive yourself of something, but to whom do you give what you do without?

Fast in such a way that you rejoice to see your dinner eaten by another, not grumbling and looking glumly, giving because the beggar wearies you rather than because you are feeding the hungry.

If you are sad when you give alms, you lose both bread and merit, because 'God loves a cheerful giver'.



*Rembrandt van Rijn 1648*

## John Donne (1572 – 1631)

Wilt thou forgive that sin where I begun,  
which is my sin, though it ere done before?  
Wilt thou forgive those sins through which I  
run,  
and do them still: though still I do deplore?  
When thou hast done, thou hast not done.  
For I have more.

Wilt thou forgive that sin by which I won  
others to sin? And made their sin my door?  
Wilt thou forgive that sin which I did shun  
a year or two, but wallowed in a score?  
When thou hast done, thou hast not done,  
for I have more.

I have a sin of fear, that when I have spun  
my last thread, I shall perish on the shore;  
Swear by thyself, that at my death thy Sun  
shall shine as it does now, and heretofore.  
And having done that, thou hast done,  
I have no more



## T.S.Eliot, Ash-Wednesday 1

Because I do not hope to turn again  
Because I do not hope  
Because I do not hope to turn  
Desiring this man's gift and that man's scope  
(Why should the aged eagle stretch its wings?)  
Why should I mourn  
The vanished power of the usual reign?  
Because I do not know again  
The infirm glory of the positive hour  
because I do not think  
Because I know I shall not know  
The one veritable transitory power  
Because I cannot drink  
There, where trees flower, and springs flow, for there is nothing again

Because I know that time is always time  
And place is always and only place  
And what is actual is actual only for one time  
And only for one place  
I rejoice that things are as they are and  
I renounce the blessed face  
And renounce the voice  
Because I cannot hope to turn again  
Consequently I rejoice, having to construct something  
Upon which to rejoice

And I pray to God to have mercy upon us  
And I pray that I might forget  
These matters that with myself I too much discuss  
Too much explain  
Because I do not hope to turn again  
Let these words answer  
For what is done, not to be done again  
May the judgement not be too heavy upon us

Because these wings are no longer wings to fly  
But merely vane to beat the air  
The air which is now thoroughly small and dry  
Smaller and dryer than the will  
Teach us to care and not to care  
Teach us to sit still.

Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death  
Pray for us now and at the hour of our death

### **Christina Rossetti, 'Uphill'**

Does the road wind uphill all the way?  
Yes, to the very end.  
Will the day's journey take the whole long day?  
From morn to night, my friend.

But is there for the night a resting place?  
A roof for when the slow dark hours begin,  
May not the darkness hide it from my face?  
You cannot miss that inn.



*Statue of Kaipunesut 2528-2520 BC*

Shall I meet other wayfarers at night?  
Those who have gone before.  
Then must I knock, or call when just in sight?  
They will not keep you standing at the door.

Shall I find comfort, travel sore and weak?  
Of labour you shall find the sum.  
Will there be beds for me and all who seek?  
Yea, beds for all who come.

**Evelyn Underhill, *Immanence***

I come in the little things,  
Saith the Lord;  
Not borne on morning wings  
Of majesty; but I have set my feet  
Amidst the delicate and bladed wheat  
That springs triumphant in the furrowed sod -  
There do I dwell, in weakness and in power;  
Not broken or divided, said our God!  
In your straight garden plot I come to power;  
About your porch my vine,  
Meek, fruitful, doth entwine,  
Waits, at the threshold, Love's appointed hour.

I come in the little things,  
Saith the Lord;  
Yea, on the glancing wings  
Of eager birds, the soft and pattering feet  
Of furred and gentle beasts, I come to meet  
Your hard and wayward heart. I stand confest  
On every nest  
Where feathery Patience is content to brood  
And leaves her pleasure for the high emprise  
Of motherhood - There does my Godhead rest.  
I come in the little things  
Saith the Lord;  
My starry wings I do forsake,  
Love's highway of humility to take;  
Meekly I fit my stature to your need.

In beggars part  
About your gates I shall not cease to plead  
As man, to speak with man  
Til by such art  
I shall achieve my immemorial plan;  
Pass the low lintel of the human heart.

**Edgar Lee Masters, Spoon River Anthology, *Marie Bateson***



You observe the carven hand  
With the index finger pointing heavenward.  
That is the direction, no doubt.  
But how should one follow it.  
It is well to abstain from murder, and lust  
To forgive, do good to others, worship God  
Without graven images,  
But these are external means after all  
By which you chiefly do good to yourself  
The inner kernel is freedom,  
It is light, purity —  
I can do no more,  
Find the goal or lose it, according to your vision.



**from a poem by Joyce Rupp (here 'who' is substituted for 'she' in the original)**

inside each of us  
there awaits  
a wonder  
full  
spirit of freedom

who waits to dance  
in the rooms of our heart  
that are closed  
dark and cluttered

who waits  
to dance  
in the spaces  
where negative feelings  
have built barricades  
and stock-piled weapons

who waits  
to dance  
in the corners  
where we still  
do not believe  
in our goodness

inside each of us  
there awaits  
a wonder  
full  
spirit of freedom

who will lift light feet  
and make glad songs  
within us  
on the day  
we open the door of ego  
and let the enemies  
stomp out

## **Martin Luther**

Paul sets forth the whole life of a Christian man in Galatians 5:6, namely, that inwardly it consists of faith towards God, and outwardly in charity and good works to our neighbour.

In faith, all works are equal, and any one work the same as any other.

God does not consider how little, or how great the works are, but God looks on the heart, which performs in faith and obedience to God the demands of its calling.

I cannot turn my neighbour away without turning God away: and that is to fall in unbelief.

We are, if I may be allowed so to express it, Christs to our neighbour.

God pays no heed to the insignificance of the work being done, but looks at the heart which is serving him in the work; and this is true of such mundane tasks as washing the dishes or milking the cows.

## **1 Corinthians 13.1**

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.

And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not ; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,

Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil,

Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;

Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

Charity never faileth: but where there be prophecies, they shall fail; where there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.

For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.

But when that which is perfect is come, then that which was in part shall be done away.

When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as I am known.

And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three: but the greatest of these is charity.

**from Time and Again Prayers**

I do not ask, O Lord, that you will think my thoughts for me or do my work for me, but that you will help me; so that what is too hard for me to do alone, and what is too difficult for me to understand by myself, I may be able to do and understand because you are with me. Teach me to think of Jesus as my friend and as one who is always by my side, for his name's sake. Amen

***Author of 'the Cloud of Unknowing'***

God in his mercy looks on you not for what you are, not for what you have been, but for what you wish to be.

St Gregory tells us that all holy desires grow by delays, and that if instead they die away, then in the first place they were never holy. For if a man feels ever less and less delight in new discoveries and in the unexpected resurgence of former desires, although he may have a *natural* desire for what is good, *holy* it never was.

St Augustine tells us that the life of a Christian is nothing else but holy desire.

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Farewell, spiritual friend, with God's blessing and mine! I pray Almighty God that true peace, wise counsel and spiritual comfort in God with abundance of grace, may be with you always and with all God's lovers upon earth. Amen

**Collect for the Sunday called Quinquagesima or the next Sunday before Lent, B.C.P.**

O Lord, who hast taught us that all our doings without charity are nothing worth: Send thy Holy Ghost, and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of charity, the very bond of peace and of all virtues, without which whosoever liveth is counted dead before thee: Grant this for thine only Son Jesus Christ's sake. Amen

