

Wednesday 26th February 2020

Ash Wednesday

Purple

“Memento, homo, quia pulvis es, et in pulverem reverteris”

“Remember, O man, thou art but dust, and unto dust thou shalt return”



Collect

Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing that you have made and forgive the sins of all those who 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 your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen

2 Corinthians 5:20-6:10 English Standard Version (ESV)

The Ministry of Reconciliation

5²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

6¹ Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. ² For he says, “In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you.” Behold, now is the favourable time; behold, now is the day of salvation. ³ We put no obstacle in anyone’s way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, ⁴ but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, ⁵ beatings, imprisonments, riots, labours, sleepless nights, hunger; ⁶ by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; ⁷ by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; ⁸ through honour and dishonour, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; ⁹ as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; ¹⁰ as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything.

COMMENT: So why are we recipients of the grace that recreates us a new beings in Christ? We have been redeemed so that in every situation we face, we may witness to what Christ has done for us and will do for all who put their trust in him. More than that, we are to help others come into the same living relationship with God that we now enjoy. Behind this ambassadorial mission lay the gospel story of Jesus’ own life so closely related to God that he called God “Father” and so fully obeyed God’s will that he accepted death as a criminal rather than deny this relationship. Paul saw his mission and that of all Christians as sharing in the life and ministry of Christ, making known through all of our relationships with others in every circumstance of life, the full quality and character of the love of God for sinners like himself. So in 6:1 “we work together

with him.” Much can be made of the term “ambassador.” (5:20) The Greek verb *presbeuo* (“to act as an ambassador”) could be translated as one who functioned as a messenger or interpreter of the will of the person he represents. That certainly describes what Paul sought to do as the apostle to the Gentiles. Yet in the Pauline corpus the word is only used twice: here and in Ephesians 6:20. Like a modern ambassador writing his memoirs after many missions during critical times, Paul goes on to recite the various circumstances in which he had carried out his mission. His use of the first person plural, “we,” is inclusive because he was commending the performance of his duties to the Corinthians with whom he had contended so long and so bitterly. He saw them as his fellow workers in Christ’s mission to make known the redeeming love of God to the entire world. It is the forgiven sinner acutely aware of the grace she/he has received who makes the best evangelist.

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21 English Standard Version (ESV)

Giving to the Needy

6 ¹ “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. ² “Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 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. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Prayer

⁵ “And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ⁶ But when 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.

Fasting

¹⁶ “And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ¹⁷ But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Lay Up Treasures in Heaven

¹⁹ “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust^[e] destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Footnotes: a. or *Let your name be kept holy*, or *Let your name be treated with reverence*. b. or *Let your kingdom come, let your will be done*. c. or *our bread for tomorrow*. d. or *the evil one*; some manuscripts add *For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen*. e. or *worm*; also verse 20.

COMMENT: How do we practice the faith that we have experienced in coming to know and put our trust in God? This passage about how to worship and live as God requires of us presents us with a continual challenge every worshipper cannot avoid. Encouraging Christian faith depends entirely on trust – trust that Christians are the ‘real deal’ – that we conform to what we preach and profess. There was biting sarcasm in Jesus’ words about those who ostentatiously gave alms, said loud prayers in public, or fasted with great fanfare. God sees what is in each human heart; and God forgives the humble penitent. True faith and spirituality comes from setting one’s priorities in keeping with God’s loving will and quietly pursuing them without regard to how others react. That was the secret of Jesus’ spiritual life. Ours can be no less, whatever that may bring.

Psalm 51:3-19 *Miserere mei, Deus* Grail Psalter

℟ Have mercy on us, O Lord, for we have sinned.

¹ *For the Choirmaster. A Maskil of David*

² *after Doeg the Edomite came and told Saul, “David has gone to the house of Abimelech.”*

³ Have mercy on me, God, in your kindness.

In your compassion blot out my offense.

⁴ O wash me more and more from my guilt
and cleanse me from my sin. ℟

⁵ My offenses truly I know them;
my sin is always before me

⁶ Against you, you alone, have I sinned;
what is evil in your sight I have done. ℟

That you may be justified when you give sentence
and be without reproach when you judge,

⁷ O see, in guilt I was born,
a sinner was I conceived. ℟

⁸ Indeed you love truth in the heart;
then in the secret of my heart teach me wisdom.

⁹ O purify me, then I shall be clean;
O wash me, I shall be whiter than snow. ℟

¹⁰ Make me hear rejoicing and gladness,
that the bones you have crushed may thrill.

¹¹ From my sins turn away your face
and blot out all my guilt. ℟

¹² A pure heart create for me, O God,
put a steadfast spirit within me.

¹³ Do not cast me away from your presence,
nor deprive me of your holy spirit. ℟

¹⁴ Give me again the joy of your help;
with a spirit of fervour sustain me,

¹⁵ that I may teach transgressors your ways
and sinners may return to you. ℟

¹⁶ O rescue me, God, my helper,
and my tongue shall ring out your goodness.

¹⁷ O Lord, open my lips
and my mouth shall declare your praise.

✠ Have mercy on us, O Lord, for we have sinned.

¹⁸ For in sacrifice you take no delight,
burnt offering from me you would refuse,

¹⁹ my sacrifice, a contrite spirit.

A humbled, contrite heart you will not spurn. **✠**

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit,**

**As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,
world without end. Amen.**

COMMENT: Despite the superscript at the beginning of this psalm, there is no reason to assume that the psalm dates from the time of David (c.1000 BC) or that it is that king's repentant prayer after his adulterous assignation with Bathsheba. These words may have come from the pious attempt of later generations to attach as much of the Psalter to their legendary tribal hero as a way of increasing his stature as nation builder at the zenith of his glory. Nonetheless, the psalm does express in the simplest words what true repentance involves. First comes the appeal to God trusting God's infinite mercy and steadfast love. Only God's grace can absolve the sinner from whatever transgressions have been committed. A prime moral insight is not only to acknowledge one's sin, but to be aware that even when one commits an offense against one's fellow humans, one sins against God. Thus whatever penalty must be paid is fully justified. The acceptance of one's sinful nature follows naturally (verse 7). The psalmist's lament turns from self-abasement to a recognition of and appeal for what God can do to restore him to a morally acceptable life.

Short Preface

And now we give you thanks because you give us the spirit of discipline, that we may triumph over evil and grow in grace, as we prepare to celebrate the paschal mystery with mind and heart renewed.

Post Communion

Almighty God, you have given your only Son to be for us both a sacrifice for sin and also an example of godly life: give us grace that we may always most thankfully receive these his inestimable gifts, and also daily endeavour to follow the blessed steps of his most holy life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Blessing

Christ give you grace to grow in holiness, to deny yourselves, take up your cross, and follow him; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you, and remain with you always. Amen.