

Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> February 2026

***Ash Wednesday***

**Gospel Reading**

**Matthew 6.1-6, 16-21**

**Concerning Almsgiving**

**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.

**2** ‘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. **3** But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, **4** so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

**Concerning Prayer**

**5** ‘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. **6** 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.

**Concerning Fasting**

**16** ‘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. **17** But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, **18** 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.

**Concerning Treasures**

**19** ‘Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; **20** but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. **21** For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

**Other Readings: Joel 2.1-2,12-17 or Isaiah 58.1-12**

**Psalm 51.1-18**

**2 Corinthians 5.20b - 6.10**

## **Homily**

Ash Wednesday marks a peaceful time. We enter Lent, not with a success story, but with the truth that we are mortal, and not invulnerable. There is much we cannot preserve. This journey through Lent begins not with achievement, but with grace. That is why the Gospel is so relevant today - Jesus leads us away from religious pressure and into a freedom that flourishes in secret.

Jesus speaks it again and again, like a heartbeat: "Your Father who sees in secret will reward you." Ash Wednesday calls us to be honest, not only with God but with ourselves. This isn't because God can't handle us in any other way, but rather because we are often unaware of our true state. Many people carry so much, often without speaking of it: problems in relationships, worries about their health, or the burden of ageing. Jesus says, God sees this, God is fully aware of the challenges and the joys.

Jesus also tells us to give in such a way that we don't show it off, and to pray in a way that doesn't require any display. It's an invitation to pray together and attain freedom. You are allowed to be devout without having to demonstrate your piety. You are allowed to do good without it becoming a small shop window. And you are allowed to pray without having to find "the right words".

On Ash Wednesday, we focus our attention especially on Jesus' words about fasting. He issues a warning against a face full of sadness and against religious ostentation. This is not due to the insignificance of fasting but rather to its intrinsic value. Fasting is not a competition of discipline, but it is a path to finding the longing of the heart. Sometimes it is only when we let go of distractions, routines, or control for a while that we see how God carries us, quietly, reliably, and in this revelation, we recognise our hearts desire - Jesus. There are different forms of fasting, and not all are suitable for everyone - for example, the sick and weak should not burden themselves further. But fasting can also take a gentler form: less news, less brooding, living life less quickly. Perhaps this Lent, we can seek to introduce, in these spaces we make available, a moment of silence, a short prayer.

Two meaningful opening questions for Lent could be: What makes me feel less free? And what could help me breathe normally again? Fasting creates space for God to encounter us inwardly, not to make us harder, but softer.

Jesus also speaks of treasure: "For where your treasure is, there your heart will also be." Ash Wednesday reminds us that much of what we cherish deeply is fragile, like recognition, plans, and health. All of this can rust, disappear, or slip away. Jesus does not say this with the intention of creating fear. Rather, he wants to redirect us, and to place our lives in that which does not decay.

Treasures in heaven are not hidden in the clouds. They are kept by God. He recognises and holds the love unconditionally given; he recognises the reconciliations that require courage; the visits that give precious time; a prayer at the kitchen table; and quiet generosity. All these things are logged by God, and through Jesus, whatever our spiritual condition, we find that His mercy surpasses our guilt.

Perhaps, from this Ash Wednesday we can take a practical approach through Lent. Allow yourself space for two minutes of quiet reflection each day. Consider using a candle, reciting a bible verse, and silently saying, "Father, have mercy." Additionally, you could do something good for someone else - without discussing it. You could even choose a form of (safe) fasting – giving up something to create space for God. Nothings massive is needed – just small and faithful steps in which God will rejoice. Remember that God's deepest work in our heart often begins in hidden and quiet ways. Amen.

## **Conversation Questions**

1. What makes me feel less free?
2. What could help me breathe normally again?
3. Is there anything else from the passage not already discussed that speaks to you?  
What is it?
4. What will you do this week in your Monday-to-Saturday ministry in response to what you have heard today? #everydayfaith

## **Prayer**

Spend some time in prayer, responding to what you have heard today and listening to what God might be saying to you.

## **Collect of the day**

*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.*

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