

Ash Wednesday

SJM 10am, 1st March 2017

**Isaiah 58 v1-12
2Cor 5 v20-6 v10**

**Psalm 51
Matthew 6 v1-6, 16-21**

A Holy Fast

OT and gospel readings today all give a clear message about our attitude in worship. They were all addressed to or written by people who were doing the right thing – outwardly - but in reality their lives were a long way from what God wanted.

Because true worship is not just an outward display; not just going to church regularly or acting religiously or living piously – it requires a change of heart, away from the natural or worldly way of doing things. Even in our alternative OT reading, the prophet Joel calls for a change of heart - “rend your heart not your garments.” There’s no getting away from it. Correct liturgy and doctrine, adherence to tradition meant/mean nothing if you ignore the hungry, the homeless, the poor and weak.

True fasting is not just abstaining from wine or chocolate or meat, it is abstaining from the hurt and sin in our lives – from the original sin which stains us, in which our natural inclination is to please ourselves rather than God. “You fast only to quarrel and fight... to strike with a wicked fist,” Ish v4

A true fast, a sign of repentance, is not just saying sorry and trying again, it is a call to healing – God is actively involved. In our Ash Wednesday litany in a moment we are going to comprehensively say sorry for all that we have done wrong. But confession is more about *us telling God* than him needing to hear it (he knows already). “Whether it’s too small to be mentioned or

too big to be forgiven isn’t yours to decide. Your task is to be honest.”

Our true worship comes from a broken spirit and a contrite heart – broken from its natural state and contrite, worn out, ground to pieces and made whole and holy through the sacrifice of Christ.

“Cleanse me with hyssop and I shall be clean; wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.”

“In Christ, I am a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come” and we will be “in him the righteousness of God” 2Cor 5 v21.