

Matthew 6:1-6,16-21

6“Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven. ²So 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. ³But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

⁵And 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. ⁶But 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.

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

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

Ash Wednesday is of course the beginning of the season of Lent, traditionally a season of reflection and fasting and the preparation of new believers for baptism/confirmation and Easter.

In the last 11 months I have written more reflections than in such a space of time than ever before. It must be over 40 and I thank those you who have read them for doing so. In March last year I looked at what I was to be about and it is to guide people spiritually. That is what I have sought to do through taking the Bible passage for the day and seeing what it said to me, and what it might say to others.

The passage above is one that set for this Ash Wednesday and is used in many Ash Wednesday services and is indeed used in our Circuit Ash Wednesday Service which will be on line from 7.30pm on the 17th from our Circuit website.

The last 12 months have been months when many have been forced to “fast” from many things they enjoy as we have lived through months of Lockdown and Tiers. These months have been months of reflection for many as to what is important in life. As we move through the coming 6 weeks of Lent are we called to give more up?

For some that might be the case, but why and what for? The use of fasting is not about a healthier physical diet it is about a healthier spiritual relationship with God, and others, and may be that for many has developed during these 11 months - even in what could be seen as wilderness times.

Perhaps this Lent we may focus upon that which we have and that which we hold important and ask “why?” Why is something of importance? Does it have intrinsic monetary values? Does it have sentimental value? Is it a reminder of people, places, and experiences? Does it almost have a Sacramental Value to it as it reminds us of God?

Jesus in this passage challenges his listeners in how they practise their faith and religion. Do we do the religious to be noticed by others? Do we flaunt our piety for others to see? Do we do what God wants of us regardless of how it is seen by others? The giving to those in need and the spending time in prayer, and even fasting, are important parts of the working out of our faith and should not be forgotten but done with a Christ focussed heart and mind.

This passage finishes with the question about treasures. “Where your treasure is there your heart will be also,” said Jesus. In this Lenten time, as we reflect and make space for God, we continue to see what is of importance to us and where our heart is focussed.