

## Living the Word

### Joel 2.12-18

This reading is an excellent trumpet blast or ram's horn blast for Lent. We do not know the circumstances in which Joel made his short proclamation, but it was a warning of the imminent approach of disaster, which he represents as the Day of the Lord. Some date the Book of Joel to the time immediately preceding the Babylonian Exile; others to a later period. In either case, this was the traditional title for the day when the Lord would exact vengeance for Israel's acts of rebellion and disobedience, a day when God would turn on sinners, sitting comfortably and confidently waiting for rewards of their acts of skulduggery and oppression; God would give them (including each of us) precisely the opposite. The moment would be swift and unexpected, so they (and we) should be sure to put ourselves in a healthier frame of mind. An appropriate thought for the beginning of Lent.

### Prayers to Remember:

TURN thou us, O good Lord, and so shall we be turned. Be favourable, O Lord, Be favourable to thy people, Who turn to thee in weeping, fasting, and praying. For thou art a merciful God, Full of compassion, long-suffering, and of great pity. Thou sparest when we deserve punishment, And in thy wrath thinkest upon mercy. Spare thy people, good Lord, Spare them, and let not thine heritage be brought to confusion. Hear us, O Lord, for thy mercy is great, And after the multitude of thy mercies look upon us; Through the merits and mediation of thy blessed Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*Collect from the Communion Service appointed for Ash Wednesday in the Book of Common Prayer (1662)*

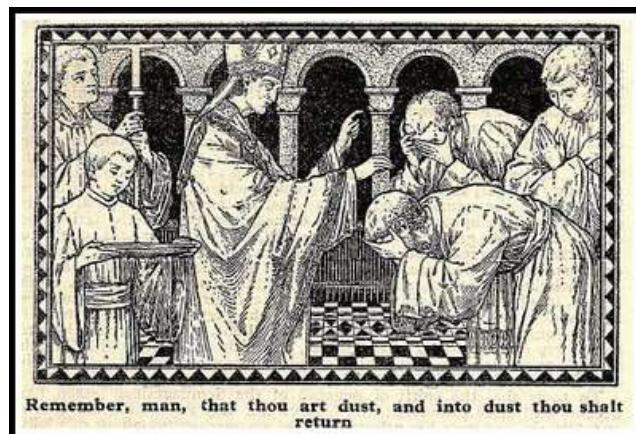
### From the Fathers

'Though I am but dust and ashes, suffer me to utter my plea to thy mercy; suffer me to speak, since it is to God's mercy that I speak and not to man's scorn. From thee too I might have scorn, but thou wilt return and have compassion on me... I only know that the gifts thy mercy had provided sustained me from the first moment... All my hope is naught save in thy great mercy. Grant what thou dost command, and command what thou wilt.'

From *Confessions* by St Augustine of Hippo (354-430, bishop, theologian)

14<sup>th</sup> February 2024

Ash Wednesday



St Matthew calls us to the traditional Lenten discipline set out for every Christian: prayer, fasting and alms-giving. This call to penitence is a call to recognise our sin and our need of God, and to turn away from everything that harms God's image in us, journeying ever nearer to the holy night of Easter, when Jesus Christ passed over from death to life. If we wish to respond in wonder and love, then let us first of all hear that call to repentance that is sounded loud and long today. Repentance means literally a 'turning around', a change of mind and heart. God is all tenderness and compassion. The Church invites us to receive the sign of the Cross in ash today, either marked on our foreheads, or scattered across the crown of the head, so that we may be put in mind of the dust of the earth from which we came, and to which we shall return.

'Hear us, O Lord, have mercy upon us, for we have sinned against thee.'

*Today's Gospel: St. Matthew 6.1-6, 16-18*