

Ash Wednesday 2024 - Read Joel chapter 1, verse 14 and chapter 2, verses 15 – 17:-

The present situation: -

Again at the beginning of Lent it is worth stepping back and looking at the wider situation in the world. Remember always that *“God so loved the world that He gave his only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”* If Father God loved this sad world of ours that much what then is our responsibility? To pray – certainly! Don’t be discouraged by the following list! Just let the Spirit guide you to pray for one or two specific situations. Many of us have contacts with Charities or Missions both at home and overseas. Maybe that is the place for you to begin.

There is ongoing war here in Europe! Death and destruction on both ‘sides’. Pray for both Ukraine and Russia. It will take years to repair damage done and maybe longer to heal hearts and minds.

A state of war in the Middle East. Not just Israel versus Hamas but the ‘West’ versus Iran, Iraq, Syria and guerilla groups in a number of other countries.

Terrorist attacks and threats in Europe – including here in the U.K.

A seeming lack of leadership in both church and government here in the U.K. A recent poll among 20 – 30 year-olds spoke of a preference for a strong leader! Danger of dictatorship??

A growing gulf between a few very rich people and those struggling to live, especially young families.

When did you last hear a sermon / address on “Holiness” and “Prayer”?

Today's Text

The book of Joel was written when the spiritual life of the people of God was at a low ebb. However, the portion appointed for Ash Wednesday is rightly a call to repentance and renewal: just as desperately needed now as it was then. The call to *“return to the Lord, your God”* (chapter 2, verse 13) is a call to the whole congregation. There are no exceptions, no one is exempt! The whole people of God is called to repentance, even an impending marriage ceremony is no excuse!

When did your church (or mine!) last come before the Lord God in unanimity to repent of the sins of the people and nation?

Maybe the obedience of the church leaders will be key in making this call to repentance a reality:-

*"Let the priests, who minister before the Lord,
weep between the portico and the altar.*

Let them say, “Spare your people, Lord.

*Do not make your inheritance an object of scorn,
a byword among the nations.*

Why should they say among the peoples,

‘Where is their God?’” (Joel chapter 2, verse 17)

The “bishops”, “priests”, “pastors”, “elders”, whatever you call your church leadership, have the prime responsibility, TO LEAD! Not just in things where there may be a “feel good factor” but in the spiritual life of the People of God.

Pray for them and the world this Lent, for peace and prosperity with justice. Pray that the leadership of the churches may be “Holy unto the Lord” (Exodus 28, verses 36 – 38)