

“Spare your people, O Lord.”

Joel 2:17

‘And the Lord God formed man... and breathed into his face the breath of life... And the Lord God had planted a paradise of pleasure from the beginning... And the Lord God brought forth of the ground all manner of trees, fair to behold, and pleasant to eat of... And God saw all the things that He had made, and they were very good’ (Gen 2:7-9; 1:31).

In the beginning, God bestowed upon the human race everything that was good: life and breath and good health, food and drink, a rich pasture, and all the good things of the earth, and harmony with each other, and union with our Creator. Pain and wretchedness, sickness and misery, and even death itself we never of God’s fashioning. Rather, He created all things that they might be (Wis 1:13-14); He created all living things that they might live, and be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth (Gen 1:28). For God is a good God, and only good things are poured forth from His hands.

We all know how hurtful it can be when we have gone to a lot of trouble to do an especial favour for someone, or have prepared and given a most particular gift, and that favour or gift goes unacknowledged, and no thanks are forthcoming. We do not usually give gifts in order to receive thanks; we do not usually offer our assistance in order to be thanked; but to have our efforts go wholly unacknowledged, and for there to be no thanks whatsoever, is, nonetheless, disappointing at least, and can be profoundly hurtful.

How might it seem to God, then, when we human beings – collectively as a race – turn our backs on the God who made us and who has given us everything we have? How might it seem to Him when we sinners – you and I – commit our sins, great or small? For is

not each sin, however lightly *we* may dismiss it, a turning away from the God who has bestowed upon us everything that we are and everything that we have?

We have almost forgotten that our beautiful and holy religion is chiefly about our turning back to God once more, and begging Him for His mercy, pleading with Him for the forgiveness of our sins?

You and I sin throughout the year, and you and I must go to Confession regularly throughout the year, at least once a month. But Lent is given to us especially as a time set apart to call down from heaven the mercy and forgiveness of Almighty God upon a sinful race collectively and upon ourselves as individuals.

‘Thus says the Lord: Return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts, not your garments... [for] who knows whether He will not turn and relent.’

And as we turn back to God, it is the job of the priests to weep on behalf of God’s people and cry out, ‘Spare your people, O Lord.’ For our sins deserve a punishment worse than death itself, so bad, in fact, that even the Son of God Himself, as He hung upon the Cross, cried out to the Father, pleading with Him for the forgiveness of our sins.

That is what we have forgotten. We have forgotten that we need to beg God for mercy, and to go on pleading with Him. Not because He is deaf, or unmerciful, or lacking in compassion, but because we have rendered ourselves unworthy of His love by our sins – and because we go on sinning – and must, therefore, do as Christ did on the Cross and offer up prayers and supplications with cries and tears, as it says in the Letter to the Hebrews (Heb 5:7). In other words, whilst we do indeed have great faith in God’s promises of redemption even so we must never presume upon His forgiveness, or take it for granted, or say about our own sins, ‘God won’t mind’ or ‘God will understand,’ for that would be the grievous sin of presumption.

To be worthy of God's love once more we must unite ourselves to His Divine Son on the Cross, and be willing to offer up to God our sufferings, and trials, and tribulations, just as Our Lord offered up His great sufferings on Calvary. Only if we join Our Lord on the Cross, and cry aloud with prayer and supplication, will we be able to be united with Him in His resurrection, and join Him in a state of blessedness forever in heaven.