

WEEKLY REFLECTIONS

ASH WEDNESDAY

Joel 2:12–18 | Ps 50:3–6, 12–14, 17, R. v.3 | 2 Corinthians 5:20–6:2 | Matthew 6:1–6, 16–18

Written by Michael McGirr

It is curious that this year Ash Wednesday happens to fall on the same day as St Valentine's Day. This doesn't happen very often. St Valentine's Day is a great occasion for florists and restaurants. Some people get carried away and arrange to propose marriage in hot air balloons and beside beautiful waterfalls. This is all great fun, and it is delightful to see people dizzy with love.

We all know that real love is about more than the good times. It is a commitment to grow together and encounter each other more and more deeply, even when the going is tough. There are legends about St Valentine but it's not clear who he may have been. The chances are, however, that he was a martyr in the early period of the Christian story. He knew that love meant sacrifice. Love lays down its own life to give life to others.

Ash Wednesday is the perfect day to think about love. We don't see flowers in church today and we are asked to eat modestly. Today, we begin our journey towards our observance and celebration of the death and resurrection of Jesus at Easter. The cross of Jesus is the ultimate symbol of how profoundly God loves the world.

Lent is a time when we are also asked to consider how authentically we make God's love visible to others. The reading today from St Paul reminds us that 'we are ambassadors for Christ.' This means taking risks and reaching beyond our comfort zones to share a message with a world that is often indifferent and doesn't want to hear it.

Each year, through Project Compassion, Caritas Australia offers us a significant opportunity to become ambassadors for Christ. The prophet Joel says, 'Why should it be said among nations, "where is their God?"' In other words, we must try to live the message of Jesus, which is one of justice, compassion, inclusion and extravagant love.

Today's Psalm is a reminder that God speaks through us:

*Give me again the joy of your help,
With a spirit of fervour sustain me,
O Lord, open my lips,
And my mouth shall declare your praise.*



Leaia sits with her daughter in their home in Samoa. Photo: Laura Womersley/Caritas Australia