**Ash Wednesday Reflection - 2021**

After the celebrations of Christmas and Candlemas comes a final day of indulgence before the serious season of Lent.  Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent. Gone are the rich foods and masquerades of Shrove Tuesday; now comes a time for sober reflection, penitence and abstinence.

Penitence means being sorrowful and remorseful for one's actions and words, repentance of one's sins of omission and commission. As the Prayer Book says, " We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against Thy holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done and done those things which we ought not to have done."  These forty days of Lent gives us time to reflect and to search our hearts, to be conscious of our failings, to acknowledge our weaknesses and to seek forgiveness.

You may feel that this pandemic has already given us ample time for painful introspection; what we need is hope of forgiveness. We know that God loves us and cares for us. We can tell Him our faults in the knowledge that if we truly repent He will forgive us, comfort and strengthen us to serve Him faithfully.

Abstinence and fasting are also part of Lent. We remember that Jesus spent forty days and nights in the desert without food and we like to do something to remind us of His preparation for His mission by denying ourselves some pleasure. While we do not follow the mortification of the flesh of the early Church we know that it does our souls and bodies good to abstain from easy gratification and now is the opportunity to practise it, using the time to think of ways of serving Jesus, building up His Church and busying ourselves with works of love.

To deepen our understanding Stowe Church has arranged a weekly Bible study on 'The Passion - Christ's final days in Holy Week' by Mike McKinley. We hope you will join us on Zoom on Friday mornings at 9.30 am.

For private study we suggest  'The Beauty of the Cross' by Tim Chester