

## Suggestions for the Day of Prayer - Ash Wednesday 2008

You may like to begin with one of the following stillness exercises :

### **1 Awareness of my body**

Start by sitting in a relaxed position, with your back straight, feet side by side on the floor, and your hands resting gently on your lap.

Concentrate for a moment on becoming aware of the feel of your feet as they press against the floor. Notice the feel of the ground beneath them, any constriction of your footwear, the feel of your individual toes - you might need to wiggle them a little to do this!

Now let that point of awareness travel up into your lower legs. Flex the muscles, and be aware of how this part of your body feels. Let any tension you find there relax and flow away.

Let that point of awareness move slowly round your body, gently travelling from one part to the part next to it. Notice the feeling in each place, and let any tension ebb away before moving on.

When your point of awareness has reached your head and face, and spent some time there, let it start again at your feet, and slowly make the same journey again, releasing any tension initially overlooked, or that has built up since you last focused there.

When this process feels as if it has reached a natural conclusion, let that point of awareness come to rest somewhere at the centre of yourself, and remain there quietly.

### **2 Awareness of sounds**

As in the other exercises, start by sitting in a relaxed position, with your back straight, feet side by side on the floor, and your hands resting gently on your lap.

Take a few moments to focus on any sounds you can hear outside the room where you are sitting. Try to identify each, and for a moment or two focus on that one alone.

Without trying to block out those sounds (let them be!) let your attention move inwards, to any sounds you can hear within the room where you are - the ticking of a clock, the hum of electrical appliances, etc. For a few moments, let your whole attention be on these sounds.

Again, without blocking these out, let your point of attention take another step inwards, and be aware of all the "noise" going on within yourself. This may be physical (the sound of your own breathing), or may be an awareness of the rush of thoughts and feelings passing through your heart and mind.

Finally, take one further step inwards, and let your awareness come to rest in some quiet, still place at the centre of yourself. Rest there in the quiet for as long as seems good to you.

### **3 Awareness of my breathing**

As in the last exercise, start by sitting in a relaxed position, with your back straight, feet side by side on the floor, and your hands resting gently on your lap.

Slowly let yourself become aware of the pattern of your own breathing. Notice whether it is deep or shallow, regular or irregular, through your mouth or your nose or both.

Don't try and change or control your breathing. Just notice as you breathe in, and as you breathe out.

(If there is anything in this experience that bothers you, if your breath starts coming too fast, for example, gently leave this exercise aside and move to one of the other stillness exercises.)

You may want simply to rest in the quietness that this awareness of breathing leads to. If, however, you want this exercise to develop into more explicit prayer, the following ideas may help:

- As you breathe in, feel yourself drawing God's life-giving Spirit deep inside yourself, so that the Spirit fills the whole of your being.
- As you breathe out, release anything that would tend to separate you from *God*, or get in the way between yourself and *God*.

### **Particular prayer ideas**

Our day of prayer this Ash Wednesday is about coming before God with “a humble penitent heart”, understanding that we truly do “come from dust”, and that “to dust we shall return”. In other words that we are not God – no matter that we sometimes behave that way! - but are human beings who are fallible and can get things wrong as well as right – that we are here to serve God and without him we can do nothing.

In this spirit then, let us pray to God to show us any areas of our own lives – behaviours, thoughts or actions – that he would like us to give attention to.

Then let us pray that same prayer for our whole church – ask God to show us the church he wants us to be. Ask him to forgive us for any areas where we may have fallen short in the past and ask him to give us the strength and resources to grow in the way he desires.

We are at a very exciting time in our churches, particularly with the formation of our Mission Community. Please pray that God will bring us together to show us how we collectively can be his church and do his work in our five parishes of town and country. Please pray for our collective Lent course, Listening to God's world, that we may truly hear each other, our neighbours and God.

Let us pray for any whom we know who are in need of healing at this time.

Let us pray for our town and villages – giving thanks for all the good that we see and praying about the needs of our communities and those who live and work in them. Let us pray especially, as we reflect on the week of Action for Poverty and Homelessness last week, for those who have to make a choice between eating and heating, for those who have no home at all, for those caught in the cycle of poverty and debt.

And we pray for the world – perhaps praying through items in the local, national and international news – maybe bring a newspaper to the day of prayer to aid both your prayer and others.

If you can't pray in church, then please consider setting aside a little time within the day for your own prayer at home.

The times for praying in church together are:

Landcross 10 am to 11.30; Littleham 11.30 am to 1 pm; St Mary's 1.00 pm to 2.30 pm; Monkleigh 2.30 pm to 4 pm and Weare Giffard 4 pm to 5.30 pm.

There will be a time when any insights from prayers may be shared, if you would like to, during the Mission Community Ash Wednesday service in Weare Giffard church at 7.30 pm.

*May the Christ who walks with the shoes of peace walk with us on the road.  
May the Christ who serves with healing hands stretch out our hands to serve.  
May the Christ who loves with the wounded heart open our hearts to love. Amen*