

How to choose a leader

Heather Smith *reflects on* Psalm 72:1-7

If an electoral candidate put the words from the first seven verses of Psalm 72 on their publicity material, would you vote for them? It would make a refreshing change from the usual contents of the endless literature, political broadcasts and meetings in the run up to an election, wouldn't it? Here is the prayer of a leader truly anointed by God.

Kings in ancient Israel had a lot of responsibilities, covering the economic well-being of the country, judgement of cases brought before them, and defending the borders from aggressors. In this psalm the king recognises his need for help from God and sets out a vision for his own behaviour and the kind of country he wants to rule over.

The king must display God's righteousness and justice in all he does, especially in his judgements and his dealings with those who are poor. He prays for prosperity from the mountains and the hills – that the land would support the people with all they need. He longs to defend the cause of the poor and to crush the oppressor.

Israel believed that God would bless it if the people loved justice. In Isaiah 3:15 God asks: "What do you mean by crushing my people, by grinding the face of the poor?"

Perhaps God is asking the same of us, and many of our leaders, today. 🙏



God of justice, show our leaders how to follow your vision for justice and prosperity and direct all who lead in your ways. Help us to choose our leaders based on their willingness to work for your standards of truth and love for all. Amen.

World Soil Day

by David Weedon

The writing has been on the wall for thousands of years, at least since the stark warning in Deuteronomy (29:22-24): "The next generation... will see... its soil burned out by sulphur and salt, nothing planted, nothing sprouting, unable to support any vegetation."

Where once this might have been true on a small scale, it's become a global problem. The United Nations warns that soil degradation affects agricultural production, food security and sustainability. World Soil Day

is held on 5 December, to focus attention on the importance of healthy soil.

This knowledge might simply make us feel powerless. What can we do about it, or any of the other huge problems we hear about? But there is real power in awareness and understanding, and our prayers become powerful if, rather than rather asking God to problem-solve, we ask for God's guidance to show us what, if anything, we can do.

www.un.org/en/observances/world-soil-day. 🙏

Advent is a season of penitence

Part 2 – fasting

by Caroline Hodgson

The week ahead is an Ember Week. There are four, roughly equidistant, Ember Weeks a year, each containing three Ember Days – Wednesday, Friday and Saturday. Traditionally, these are days of fasting and prayer. Additionally, many Christians in the Eastern and Orthodox traditions observe the Nativity Fast (sometimes called St Philip's fast), a period of abstinence and penance running from 15 November to 24 December.

There is a strong link between body and soul – what happens to one happens to the other. It is not enough to fast from food; one must also abstain from anger, greed and covetousness. Fasting is not just personal practice, but has a public purpose.

This idea is articulated by the prophet Isaiah (58:6-7): "Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house?" 🙏

“Only Jesus, who bids us to follow him, knows the journey's end. But we do know that it will be a road of boundless mercy.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945), German pastor, theologian and anti-Nazi dissident