

## Ash Wednesday - 2026

**Joel 2:12-18; Psalm 50; 2<sup>nd</sup> Cor; Matt 6:1-6. 16-18**

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At the beginning of last Lent, if I remember correctly, I said I was going to enter into the wilderness and follow Jesus in the company of Mary and my guardian angel. In some ways I feel as if I have never left the wilderness, the summons still seemed to be there, even through the high feasting of Easter. Maybe this was wrong, I do not know, I can only tell you what was. The wilderness never felt 'behind me' and our Lady and my angel have continued to be beside me. Furthermore, I continued to respond to the desire to hone my practice in the midst of my weakness in prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Well, I will focus on them again. I know they are very import – without them there is no Lent - but I think that in the past I have been focused too much on them and not used them properly as a lens through which to 'see' with.

This year, I am not going to carry, prayer, fasting and almsgiving thought Lent: I am going to dress myself with them. What I am going to carry with me is the Blessed Sacrament. I do not mean that I am going to physically carry the Blessed Sacrament about with me, as that would not be suitable nor reverential. I mean that I desire to be much more focused on recollecting on how the Blessed Sacrament is sustaining me each moment of each day, especially outside of Mass.

Let me tell you about Marthe Robin.<sup>1</sup> She was born in 1902 in the outskirts of Lyon. She died in 1981 in the same house at the age of 78. I dare

say most of you have not heard of her. She grew up as a pious child, making her 1<sup>st</sup> Holy Communion at the age of 10, she left school at the age of 14 and worked as a peasant girl in the fields and at home. At the age of 16 she was partially paralysed by an un-known condition. She received last rites at the age of 19, but unexpectedly lived. She started to write down her spiritual reflections in which she offered herself as a living sacrifice to God. (*Consecration Totale de Victime d'Amour*). In October 1926 she once again received the last rites but lived. During this sickness she had several visions of St Therese of Lisieux who told Marthe that she would live and continue her mission of love. Marthe went on to establish the 'Foyers of Charity', a world-wide Christian society. This is remarkable in itself. But the fuller reality is more astonishing, when I tell you that Marthe became paralyzed from head to foot and spent the last 50 years of her life never moving from her couch, she received the stigmata – the marks of the Crucifixion - at the age of 28, and spent the last 40 years of her life blind.

It is testified that from the time she received the stigmata, the wounds of Christ – which opened up every week on Friday, she never ate, or received sustenance except for Holy Communion once a week. She never spoke of these things. Perhaps you cannot believe that she only received Holy Communion, and that this was enough to keep her alive for 50 years. If you cannot believe I cannot convince you, but even if it is a pious tale it still seems that we can say that she really was 'sustained by the Blessed Sacrament', that her life revolved

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<sup>1</sup> Taken from: Marthe Robin: a Chosen Soul, CTS, London, 1999

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around receiving the Body of Christ so much that she shared with Him his wounds, his suffering and his silence and her love for His mother.

I cannot take such a life as Marthe's upon myself, and I cannot even wish this upon myself. Such gifts are only offered and bestowed by God on chosen souls: they are not to be grasped. But to understand the Blessed Sacrament, to love it and to make it my centre, this I can surely at least try to do. I can try to do it with prayer, fasting and almsgiving, to use them to strip away what hinders love and let myself be washed in the Wounds of Christ. And to be sustained by Him alone. Alone by His Body and Blood. And for this I will willingly walk through the wilderness once more.