

Dear Friend

Today is known in the church as an "Ember Day". There are four sets of Ember Days in the year, when the church is called to fast and pray. Traditionally they have been observed on the Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays within the weeks before the Third Sunday of Advent, the Second Sunday of Lent and the Sundays nearest to 29 June and 29 September. The origin of the term is unclear, but it may derive from the Anglo-Saxon *ymbren*, a circuit or revolution (from *ymb*, around, and *ryne*, a course, running), clearly relating to the annual cycle of the year. The word occurs in such Anglo-Saxon compounds as *ymbren-tid* ("Embertide"), *ymbren-wucan* ("Ember weeks"), *ymbren-fisstan* ("Ember fasts"), *ymbren-dagas* ("Ember days"). The word *imbren* even makes it into the acts of the "Council of Ænham" (1009): *jejunia quatuor tempora quae imbren vocant*, "the fasts of the four seasons which are called *imbren*". It corresponds also with Pope Leo the Great's definition, *jejunia ecclesiastica per totius anni circulum distributa* ("fasts of the church distributed through the whole circuit of the year"). *Source - Wikipedia*

So Ember Days coincide with the changing of the seasons and the purpose of their introduction was to thank God for the gifts of nature, to teach people to make use of them in moderation, to assist the needy, as well as being a way for the church to sanctify the natural cycles of the year. These days set apart for special prayer and fasting are considered especially suitable for the ordination of clergy.

Embertide is also when particular prayer is made in connection with vocation - God's call into ministry. Although there are particular ministries within the church, it is worth pondering and reflecting on the reality that every single one of us is called by God. This is reflected in some of the liturgy used during these days, for example prayers of confession:

Introduction to Confession

God has called us to follow Christ,
and has formed us into a royal priesthood, a holy nation,
to declare the wonderful deeds of him who has called us
out of darkness into his marvellous light.
Let us confess the times when we have failed to heed this call.

Kyrie Confession

Lord Jesus, you said to your disciples:
'You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you.'
Lord, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, we know that the harvest is plentiful
but the labourers are few.
Christ, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy.

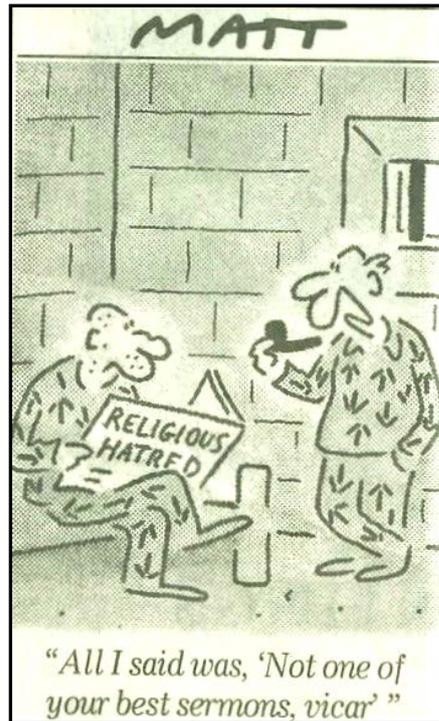
Lord Jesus, you appointed us to go and bear fruit that will last.
Lord, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

And the Collect:

Almighty and everlasting God,
by whose Spirit the whole body of the Church
is governed and sanctified:
hear our prayer which we offer for all your faithful people,
that in their vocation and ministry
they may serve you in holiness and truth
to the glory of your name;
through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

So on the final Ember Day of this week, may we all seek to respond afresh to God's call. The world is in great need of hope, direction and truth. We know that Jesus Christ is the only source of hope as he is the way, the truth and the life. The call of God is above all a call to be joined together in a new community of love. May God by his Spirit equip us so we may complete the task he has set before us.

Something to help keep us smiling through:



From an Embertide blessing:

May the boldness of the Spirit transform you,
may the gentleness of the Spirit lead you,
may the gifts of the Spirit equip you
to serve and worship God.

With much love and prayers

Simon