

**ASH WEDNESDAY 2017**  
**HOMILY – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH**  
**FATHER CRAIG LOONEY**  
**JOEL 2.12 ST. MATTHEW 6.16**

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Lent is a treasure to be lived! Ash Wednesday is about life...not death!

About 500 years before the birth of Jesus, the prophet Joel wrote:

*“Come back to the Lord your God. He is kind and patient, always ready to forgive and not punish.”*

Lent is not about punishment...it is about restoration to wholeness. It is about God’s love and compassion...which surpasses our full understanding.

Dutch Roman Catholic priest Henri J.M. Nouwen wrote:

*“God’s love for his people should not be forgotten. It should remain with us in the present. When everything is dark, when we are surrounded by despairing voices, when we do not see any exits, then we can find salvation in a remembered love, a love that is not simply a wistful recollection of a bygone past, but a living force that sustains us in the present.”*

Joel’s words came with a call to stop actions that were destructive and unhealthy and replace them with actions that were productive and positive...a call to come back to God...whose love for us is the greatest treasure we have.

Look at the Altar Crucifix. It is there to remind us God loves us so much he was willing to walk among us, so we might one day walk with him in heaven. His walk among us on earth led to his death on that Cross...the act of supreme love we commemorate on Good Friday.

The ashes we just received on our foreheads are in the shape of the cross. They remind us of our roots...we are made from dust and we will return to dust. But the ashes are for us a symbol of hope, because it is by the Cross we are put right with God.

C.S. Lewis, author of *Mere Christianity*, *The Screwtape Letters*, *The Chronicles of Narnia* and many other books and perhaps the pre-eminent lay theologian of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, wrote:

*“The central Christian belief is that Christ’s death has somehow put us right with God and given us a fresh start.”*

Lent is about having a fresh start...about refocusing our eyes, hearts, and minds on the cross...and what it represents...the awesome healing power of God’s love for us.

What Jesus accomplished for us on the cross was done out of profound love...for that we must always be thankful. But Lent is not about being sad or depressed...it is about renewal...it is about taking steps forward...it is about taking action...it is about getting our house clean and in order...so we can more fully celebrate Easter.

Psalm 51 provides us with a simple prayer for Lent and it is reflected in the Lenten Collect which we should be saying every day during Lent:

*“God...make our hearts pure and put a new and loyal spirit in us.”*

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