

**ASH WEDNESDAY 2019**  
**HOMILY-SAINT JOSEPH PARISH**  
**FATHER CRAIG LOONEY**  
**JOEL 2.12 PSALM 51.10**



Lent is about putting childish and immature actions behind us...and coming back to God. We need to listen to what God told the prophet Joel about 500 years before Jesus was born. We need to let our broken hearts show our sorrow and compel us to make changes.

About 300 years before Joel, God told the prophet Jonah to go to the city of Nineveh and warn them of the imminent destruction they were bringing on themselves. Nineveh was the capital of the great Assyrian Empire and was described as a place of "great wickedness". Nineveh was located on the outskirts of present-day Mosul in northern Iraq.

Jonah didn't want to go to Nineveh because he was convinced God would change his mind about destroying the city and show mercy. He decided to run away to Spain to try to hide from God but the seas was too rough and his trip was cut short. He eventually obeyed God and went to Nineveh.

When Jonah preached to the people of Nineveh they listened to him and turned away from dark and destructive behavior. To show their hearts were broken and they were serious about change...everyone from the King on down began a great fast. They put on sackcloth and covered themselves with dirt. God changed his mind and Nineveh wasn't destroyed.

It's a wonderful story about repentance and God's tendency to show mercy...but there's more. Jonah was angry with God for showing mercy...he was hoping God would put on a spectacular light show and leave Nineveh in ruins. God told Jonah he was just feeling sorry for himself and he had no right to be angry because he showed mercy on the people of Nineveh.

Lent is ultimately about being honest with ourselves and God...we sometimes act like spoiled children...we do things we shouldn't...we don't do the things we should. There is a way out of the messes we get ourselves into...and it begins with a change of heart. The Collect for Ash Wednesday tells us God offers us perfect remission and forgiveness. We have to admit to ourselves we need to be forgiven.

At the beginning of the Mass, ashes in the shape of a cross were placed on our foreheads. The ashes remind us of our own mortality...we are made from dust and when we die we will return to dust. The ashes are shaped like a cross because it is by Jesus' death on the cross the possibility of life everlasting in heaven is made available to us.

The basic message Christianity offers the world is one of hope. Jesus offers us life not death. Dark and destructive words and actions can only lead to spiritual death and separation from God. Turning away from those things and turning back to God brings us light and restores our spiritual lives to what they should be.

Lent should be for us a time of serious personal introspection and prayer. Lent should be for us a time of positive change in our lives. Lent helps prepare us for a more joyful celebration of Easter...without Lent...there can be no Easter...without Good Friday...there can be no resurrection. Without repentance and commitment to change...there can be no forgiveness.

Lent begins in the heart. Change begins in the heart. Change is only possible through prayer. In Psalm 51 we ask God to create a pure heart in us and put a new and loyal spirit in us.

Let God break down our hearts so they can be renewed and made stronger now and always.

