

Ash Wednesday 2022

Homily-Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

Joel 2.12-17 St. Matthew 6.16-21



Ash Wednesday is the commencement of the Season of Lent. The word *Lent* is the shortened form of the Old English word *lencten*...meaning "Spring Season" and "lengthening". The long dark winter days give way to the longer daylight of Spring and Summer.

The Collect for Ash Wednesday sets the stage for the entire Season. God does not hate anything he has created, and he is always ready to forgive those who say they are sorry for their sins. The *Book of Common Prayer* directs we say this Collect every day during Lent until Palm Sunday. Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are also the two days the Prayer Book designates as Days of Fast and Abstinence. But all Sundays, even during Lent, are festivals of the Resurrection, and not fast days.

The inspiration for the Collect is Psalm 51... "Create a pure heart in me, O God, and put a new and loyal spirit in me" (TEV). We're asking God to send his Holy Spirit to reorient our hearts back toward him and help us to remain loyal to him...because we are grateful he forgives us for the things we have done and failed to do.

We begin the process of receiving God's forgiveness by repenting...admitting we have sinned and messed up our lives. It's time to take out our virtual spiritual vacuum cleaners and clean house...getting rid of the cobwebs clouding our thinking and disrupting our spiritual lives. Once our spiritual house is cleaned...we must make a concerted effort to keep it clean. We can only do that with God's help.

Five hundred years before the birth of Jesus, the Prophet Joel wrote we should come back to the Lord our God...He is kind and patient,

always ready to forgive us and not punish us. The ashes on our foreheads are a visible sign of our repentance...of our turning away from our sins...and turning back to the God who loves us so much, he sent his only Son, Jesus, to pay the ultimate price for our betrayal.

We should not be afraid to admit we have sinned, to ask God to forgive us. If we hold back we are really saying God can't forgive us, or we have no reason to ask for his forgiveness. What God want is for us to lay our sins in front of him so he can forgive us and release us from the guilt that goes along with sin.

The ashes on our foreheads are in the shape of the cross. They remind us of our own mortality...we are made from dust and when we die...and we all will some day...we will return to dust. But the cross is also the sign of hope and life after death...it teaches us death is not extinction.

Lent gives us the opportunity to focus on the cross...and recreate through the Church's liturgies the Journey Jesus took to the cross. We will walk along with him to the hill outside Jerusalem that will be the site of his execution. We will be there on the first Good Friday...the darkest day in human history. We will then experience immense joy as darkness is replaced by the light of Easter Day. Our Lenten journey should also include some degree of fasting and abstinence and taking part in the Parish's additional Lenten services.

Lent is our time of spiritual renewal. We should be glad God loves so much he thought we were worth saving. The ultimate act of his love...he sent his Son, Jesus, whose death on the cross, made it possible for us to share everlasting life with him.

God does not hate anything he has created, and he is always ready to forgive those who say they are sorry for their sins. We have every reason to celebrate Lent and start making some positive changes in our lives.

