

Ash Wednesday 2023  
Homily – Saint Joseph Parish  
Father Craig Looney  
*Joel 2.12-17*



***The Road Back to God*** is the title of one of our Lent Devotional Booklet by The Rev. Dr. Larry Neeb (1939-2019) Dr. Neeb was a Lutheran pastor, author and educator. He founded Creative Communications for the Parish...our primary source for inspirational and devotional material.

Dr. Neeb echoes the compelling words of the prophet Joel written about 500 years before the birth of Jesus...

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

If we think about it...our Lenten Journey is the road back to God. Joel’s words are a call to action! Lent is the time for us to make dynamic and substantive changes in our lives. If the road we have been taking has been leading us away from love of God and love of others...we need to change direction.

Lent gives us the opportunity to do some soul-searching and reorient our priorities...a spiritual change of direction. Our Lenten spiritual discipline can include giving something up...such as the before-dinner cocktail or the decadent chocolate cake. We can also take something on...set time aside every day to read a Psalm or Chapter in the Bible. We should also read the Collect for Ash Wednesday...which the Prayer instructs us to read every day during Lent until Palm Sunday.

Morning Prayer and the Litany for Church and Evangelism will be read every Wednesday in the church during Lent and Passiontide. This is an opportunity for us to take the road back to God together as a parish family. There will also be time for quiet mediation.

Ash Wednesday commences our journey to the cross...our road back to God. The ashes placed on our foreheads are in the shape of the cross. While they remind us of our roots...we are made from dust and we will return to dust when we die...the ashes don’t symbolize extinction. The ashes symbolize hope...of God’s love and forgiveness...and the Life to Come!

During our Lenten liturgies...we join Jesus on his own journey to the cross...his own road back to God the Father. Look at the cross at the High Altar. The figure of Jesus on the cross reminds us God loves us so much he was willing to sacrifice his Son for us. Jesus walked among us, so we could one day walk with him in heaven.

Jesus took the sins of the whole world on his shoulders to the cross. With his death he defeated sin once and for all time...and destroyed its power over us.

When we find ourselves taking the wrong road...we have the opportunity to take the off ramp just ahead...and turn back...and it’s OK to start the road back to God at Milepost One!

The road back to God is just ahead...and we don’t need GPS or a road map. Psalm 51 gives us clear directions...

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

It’s time for us to begin the journey to the cross and the road back to God. When we encounter obstacles along the way...and we will...let’s remember to ask God for help. We don’t have to travel the road alone.

Let’s pray God will bless us during our Lenten journey...so we can be truly ready for Easter.

