

# February 14, 2018

## Ash Wednesday

Readings can be obtained from: <http://uscgb.org/bible/readings/021418.cfm>

Saints Cyril and Methodius: <https://www.franciscanmedia.org/saints-cyril-and-methodius/>

Readings: Joel 2: 12-18; Psalm 51: 3-4, 5-6, 12-13, 14, 17; 2 Corinthians 5: 20 - 6: 2; Matthew 6: 1-6, 16-18

Our first reading is a call to repentance (*μετάνοια - metanoia*). All the people are asked to return to the LORD and seek forgiveness for their sins and practice acts of mortification: fasting and refraining from pleasurable acts. They are to ask GOD to spare GOD's holy people from the punishment which they deserve for their sinfulness. And GOD *relents* from punishing the people.

The psalm builds on this theme of repentance with the refrain: "Be merciful, O LORD, for we have sinned." It, too, is a plea to GOD to look beyond the sinfulness of the past and to bring a new, clean heart to the people.

St. Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians tells the people to be reconciled with GOD. He reminds them that now is the time – now is the day of salvation.

In our Gospel today, Jesus speaks of three signs of a change of heart (*metanoia*): almsgiving, prayer, and fasting. He also warns that these penitential acts must not be done ostentatiously, to show off, but must be done privately so only GOD is aware of the deeds.

Yes, we are beginning the great penitential season of the church year – Lent. Lent comes from an old English word which means "lengthening" of daylight or "springtime." We are called to look from the deadness of winter to the new life of spring. Yet, to get to the new life, we must be willing to go through mortification – a certain dying to self. And the reason for this mortification is because we are sinful people. We have not always had GOD as our focus and we have not always been aiming toward GOD.

Our readings speak of ways of changing our directions (*metanoia* or repentance). It should be both a community response (first reading) and an individual response (Gospel). We need to acknowledge our sinfulness, our missing the mark, our being *a-theos* (away from GOD). We also need to ask GOD to help us to re-orient ourselves to being *ad-Deum* (toward GOD). And we are reminded that now is the time to spend our energy and efforts on this change of direction.



<https://lifegivingwater.files.wordpress.com/2013/02/f861adf7-423a-43fc-877a28ef8ab9b406.png>

giving of our time, talent, and treasure to furthering the Gospel (GOoD News) of Jesus the Christ. And it needs to be done in cheerful and joyful manner (2 Cor. 9: 7), not causing people to take note of us, but in a way which only GOD is aware. Almsgiving is the unconditional giving of ourselves to better and edify ourselves and others. It means that other people are more important than our things, our possessions. It is as much an attitude of our minds as an action of our living. Or better put, the attitude of our minds should flow into our action of living.

**Prayer** is the way we relate to GOD. We must do **ACTS**. We are called to **Adore** GOD, acknowledge GOD for all of Who GOD is. We must be **Contrite** – recognizing who we are in GOD's sight – sinful, less than we could be, in need of GOD's help. We must be people of **Thanksgiving** who proclaim our gratefulness to GOD for all GOD has done, is doing, and will continue to do in our lives. We must be people of **Supplication** – asking GOD's help for ourselves and for others. Prayer is not just



<http://www.bellefontefaith.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Ash-Wednesday-Graphic-web.jpg>

Today is Ash Wednesday, a day when we are marked with an ashen cross on our foreheads to remind us to be people who live by the cross, individuals who are but ashes in the overall picture, but persons who can make a difference if we align ourselves with the all-mighty and ever-forgiving GOD. Ashes have been a sign of repentance for many millennia. They signify our insignificance and our ultimate destiny without GOD – returning to the dust of the earth. With GOD, however, there is a chance for new life, fuller life, eternal life.

So what does all this mean for us in a practical way? We are called to look at our lives and see where we are headed, not just in our daily living, but also in the ultimate view of the world. We need to look at our relationship with GOD and with others and see where we have missed the mark (sinned) and what we must do to get back on target (toward GOD). And this whole process must be done not in showy way so that people will say: "Oh, look, at that person, they are doing penance." We must put into practice the acts of mortification spoken of in today's Gospel: **almsgiving, prayer, and fasting**.

**Almsgiving** should be more than just giving money to a charitable organization, such as to those who people who are experiencing financial difficulties or suffering from disasters. It should be a

**\*Are we seeking to please God or ourselves?**

**\*Is our aim more to advance God's kingdom or to build a reputation?**

**\*Is our service Christ-centered or self-centered?**

<https://image.slidesharecdn.com/09september162012matthew61-18rightmotives-120929223127-phpapp01/95/09-september-16-2012-matthew-61-18-right-motives-8-728.jpg?cb=1349626167>

words we say, it is our attitude about GOD – our relationship with GOD. It is not just something we do an hour on Sunday and before meals, it is who we are at every moment in our relationship with GOD and with others.

**Fasting** is doing without. It is not just doing without food; it is the emptying of ourselves of all that is blocking our focusing on GOD. We do without, so that we can be filled with GOD and with gifts from GOD. It is looking at what we have, and realizing that what we have (possessions, food, habits) may be preventing us from being in touch with our GOD, at least as fully as we can be. And it also implies that as we empty ourselves of those possessions, attitudes, and values to which we cling, we also must open ourselves and let GOD fill us with what we truly need to be faithful disciples of the Lord Jesus.

So what are my suggestions for Lent? I am going to work on one thing each day of Lent. I am consciously going to choose how I might focus more on GOD each day. For example, I will see what it is that has been something I value, and see how I might share that with just one person. That is almsgiving, sharing something I value with another. One day it might be money. I might try to give to some charity. It might be donating blood to a blood bank. On another day, it could be my time. I might share some of my time with someone who needs me. Another day, I will see how I might be more aware of GOD in my life. It may mean I will turn off my favorite television show, and spend time reading scripture or a spiritual book. It may mean I stop by church and sit in the presence of GOD. It may mean I think of someone who is going through a rough time and spend time lifting that person up in my prayer time with GOD or physically spending time with him/her. Another day, I might fast from doing something I like, for example searching the Internet for interesting information, and instead I will write a letter to someone with whom I have been meaning to correspond.

My Lenten journey will be filled with concentrated, short-term acts of almsgiving, prayer, and fasting. I may write them down in a journal, so that at Easter, I can look back and see where I have been going on my Lenten travels. Not in the sense of saying that I did a GOoD job, but to see where I have grown in my relationship with GOD and my interaction with others. I might also share my Lenten experiences with one another person, a spiritual advisor or friend, so that that person can help me to travel along with the Lord Jesus as I go through Lent. This other person will encourage me and challenge me so that I stay focused on the Lord Jesus and my becoming a more faithful disciple (disciplined learner) of the Master.

Lent is a special time in which we can dedicate ourselves to looking at who we are in GOD's sight and getting back on target. It is a time of dying with Christ, putting to death anything that is not helping me draw closer to GOD. It is a time of renewal so we will be really able to celebrate the new life of the Risen Lord on Easter. And now is the time that is being *lent* to us in order to put ourselves on this journey of faith.

**The personal question/action for today:** How am I going to make Lent a time of drawing closer to the Lord Jesus? What forms of almsgiving can I perform besides just giving money? From what can I fast so that I will have time to be with the Lord Jesus and be filled with the blessings which GOD has in store for me? What extra ways will I spend time in prayer during Lent? How can I help others have a more spiritual experience of Lent this year?

*Blessed are You, LORD GOD, almighty and ever-forgiving, willing to relent the punishment we deserve for our sins, if we but turn to You. Through Your GOoDness, You desire that we draw closer to You through this Lenten season. You call us to honestly look at our lives and see what it is that blocks us from fully following Your Son as He leads us to a closer relationship with You. Help us to repent of our sins, turn our lives more fully towards You. You ask us to participate in the suffering and death of Your Son, Jesus, as we die to ourselves through acts of almsgiving, prayer, and fasting. Help us to stay focused so that at the end of this Lent, we will be able to share in the newness of life that comes from the Risen Lord. We make this prayer through Jesus, Your Son, our Brother and Master-Teacher, Who has gone before us in His suffering and death, and Who is the Resurrection and New Life, and Who is living and reigning with You, and the Holy Spirit, our one and only GOD, forever and ever. Amen.*

**Song of the Day:** *Create in Me a Clean Heart* by Keith Green: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mD2PJ0xbAdY>  
*Ashes* by Tom Conry: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8dO5kBOGnYA> or  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=201EAS55q6U> (with Microsoft Sam "singing")

**Video of the Day:** *Ash Wednesday:* [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gn\\_5c-EYGZ4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gn_5c-EYGZ4)  
*Ash Wednesday:* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3DB-I5SnMRg>  
*Sts. Cyril and Methodius:* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n7cme6ZvXGA>