

GOSPEL LESSON—Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

We are tied to the historic church with these lessons. Jesus taught the people of His day. In Matthew 6 Jesus warned them about the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. The Pharisees and the Sadducee presented themselves as virtuous. Jesus looked through their hypocrisy and pointed to their heart. As Joel told us to rend our hearts and not our clothes, Jesus told us to do our acts of penance in private. I have always considered this to be an act of maturity that few of us ever attain. Only Jesus never complained about His circumstances. We whine and moan and complain, and tell everyone (with great pride,) what we have given up for Lent.

PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

© Blessed are You, O Lord, and blessed is Your name forever and ever. You are the greatness and the power, the victory and the majesty. You, are Heaven and Earth, and You are God over all. You are Holy and Your works are righteousness. You who Love righteousness and hate sin have declared with justice, the punishment for our transgressions. The wages for sin is death; and if You, O Lord, would add up our sins, none of us could stand. There is none that does good; and our works of righteousness are dark and bitter things.

There is forgiveness with You, O heavenly Father, therefore, we acknowledge our sins and lay our trespasses before You. We come before You, humbly trusting in Your promise that if we confess our sins, You are faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. We plead the merits of Your Only Begotten Son who called sinners to repentance. For the sake of His innocent suffering and death, pardon us. Wash us in His precious blood, and free us from the guilt of our sin.

By Your Spirit lead us from our folly, deliver us from our willfulness, refresh our souls and restore us to the comfort of the cross, where Christ reconciled us to You.

For all who seek Your mercy and help, the sick and the aged, the lonely and the weary, the disheartened and the discouraged, we pray. Supply their needs according to the riches in Christ Jesus and grant them joyful deliverance from all of their trials. Be with us as we live out our personal attempts of piety during these 40 days of Lent.

Hear us as we bring to You our private petitions. **(Time of silent prayer.)**

Let Your benediction fall on us as we come to Your Holy Table. By partaking of this bread and wine we remember our Lord, Jesus Christ. Grant us a faithful memory of all He has done for us and give us thankful hearts to praise, serve and obey Him, even as we pray in His name.

© Amen.

ASH WEDNESDAY

Chant Tone



Introit

The sacrifices of God are a broken
—spirit;*
a broken and contrite heart, O God,
You will | not despise.

Have mercy upon | me, O God;*
according | to Your love;
according to Your abundant —mercy*
blot out my trans —gressions.
Wash me thoroughly from my in | iquity,*
and cleanse me | from my sin.

Create in me a clean heart, —O God,*
and renew a right spirit with —in me.

Cast me not away from Your —presence,*
and take not Your Holy Spirit
—from me.

Restore to me the joy of Your sal —vation,*
and uphold me with a willing —spirit.

Glory be to the Father and | to the Son*
and to the Holy —Spirit;
as it was in the be —ginning,*
is now, and will be forever. —Amen.

The sacrifices of God are a broken
—spirit;*
a broken and contrite heart, O God,
You will | not despise.

*(Antiphon, Psalm 51:17;
Psalm 51:1-3, 10-12)*

Collect of the Day

Almighty and everlasting God, You despise nothing You have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent. Create in us new and contrite hearts that lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness we may receive from You full pardon and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever.

Gradual

[O come, let us fix our eyes on] —Jesus,*
the founder and perfecter | of our faith,
Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despis | ing the shame,*
and is seated at the right hand of the | throne of God.

(Hebrews 12:2)

Verse

Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and | merciful,*
slow to anger, and abounding in | steadfast love.

(Joel 2:13b)

ENTRANCE PRAYER: Almighty and Everlasting God, because You hate nothing You have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent, create in me a new contrite heart that I, repenting of my sins and acknowledging my wretchedness, may obtain from You, perfect remission of my sins and perfect forgiveness in Your sight. Graciously bestow on me Your Holy Spirit, so that I will bear witnesses to my Savior. Today and during the entire season of Lent, open my eyes to the opportunities to bring others to the outstretched arms of our Savior, that they too may be brought to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Amen (So be it, Lord.)

ASH WEDNESDAY IS A CELEBRATION WITH A LONG HISTORY OF DEVELOPMENT. The Early Church used sackcloth and ashes as a public sign of penance. By the second century it was not unknown for a penitent to place ashes on his head and stand outside of church, asking for the prayers of those entering. Today there are some groups of Christians who have a cross of ashes "painted" on their forehead. The use of ashes for penance comes from the Levitical Law. If we are able to correctly understand the words of Hebrews 9:14, (although we are unsure what Scripture is quoted) the ashes of a certain "red" heifer were used in a purification ritual by the Israelite nation. Our Ash Wednesday event is a spiritual sprinkling of ashes to signal the beginning of the 40 day fast (not counting Sundays) which makes up Lent. We the penitent who sit in our spiritual sackcloth and ashes, have been accepted by our Father through the prayers of Jesus. Acknowledging our sin we have been sanctified and purified for our life in Heaven through the blood of Jesus, in the water and Word of our Baptism.

THEME OF THE DAY:

Give Up Your Sin

WORSHIP NOTES: Thomas Talley, an expert on the history of the liturgical year, says that the first liturgy for Ash Wednesday that includes ashes is in Germany in 960. As early as the sixth century, the Spanish Mozarabic rite calls for forehead ashes when dealing with a gravely ill person. At the beginning of the 11th century, Abbot Aelfric notes that it was customary for everyone to take part in a ceremony on the Wednesday before Lent that included ashes. Only later did this day come to be called Ash Wednesday. Our Propers for Ash Wednesday date from at least 960.

INTROIT—(Antiphon: Psalm 51:17;) Psalm 51:1-3, 10-12
Psalm 91 was written by David because of his sin with Bathsheba. We use it to remind ourselves our sin in our relationship with God.

COLLECT

Since Ash Wednesday is a new beginning (the beginning of Lent) we go all the way back to our creation (with memories of Adam and Eve) to ask God to Love what He created, (by which we mean humans.) Then we remind Him that there is remission of sins given to us by the work and person of Christ. Then we asked to be made aware of our sinfulness that we are ever a part of the forgiveness.

OLD TESTAMENT LESSON—Joel 2:12-19

We especially use this lesson today, because it includes the exhortation to: "return to the Lord with fasting." The Prophet Joel moved on to list the truth of proper fasting. It is a rending of the hearts rather than the some form of clothing. This accords with Jesus' word in the Gospel.

GRADUAL—Hebrews 12:2

Hebrews chapter 12 compares the greater wonder of Heaven to our place here on Earth. We don't always consider what Jesus gave up to take on human flesh and live on Earth. Plus then to accomplish our salvation, He was shamed with a death of hanging from a cross. All of that work was done because God wanted you to be eternally in Heaven!

EPISTLE LESSON—2 Corinthians 5:20b–6:10

At the end of chapter five (5:20b,) Paul was pushing one word on the people: "reconciliation." Then, (in chapter 6,) as a second thought we not only hear the message of the reconciliation effected by Jesus in our flesh, we also learn the way to put that reconciliation into practice, (mainly by giving up our flagrant sin.) By way of that reconciliation to God through Christ, we are able to endure many things. The most productive thing we could "give up," for Lent would be sin; pick a Commandment, identify the way that you violate that Commandment, for the 40 days of Lent, intentionally stop that sin.

VERSE—Joel 2:13b

We do not sing Alleluias during Lent. Therefore, from the time of our 1941 Hymnal we proscribed the use of Joel 2:13 to be used instead. However, Joel is historically only used on Ash Wednesday. For Lent then, I will print the historic verse with comment. Joel 2:13 reminds us that God, through the work and person of Jesus, always invites us to repent and return to Him.