



ASH
WEDNESDAY

Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing you have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

THE OLD TESTAMENT

Joel 2:1-2,12-17

Blow the trumpet in Zion;
 sound the alarm on my holy mountain!
Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble,
 for the day of the Lord is coming, it is near--
a day of darkness and gloom,
 a day of clouds and thick darkness!
Like blackness spread upon the mountains
 a great and powerful army comes;
their like has never been from of old,
 nor will be again after them
 in ages to come.

Yet even now, says the Lord,
 return to me with all your heart,
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;
 rend your hearts and not your clothing.
Return to the Lord, your God,
 for he is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love,
 and relents from punishing.
Who knows whether he will not turn and relent,
 and leave a blessing behind him,
a grain offering and a drink offering
 for the Lord, your God?

Blow the trumpet in Zion;
 sanctify a fast;
call a solemn assembly;
 gather the people.
Sanctify the congregation;
 assemble the aged;
gather the children,
 even infants at the breast.
Let the bridegroom leave his room,

and the bride her canopy.

Between the vestibule and the altar
let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep.
Let them say, "Spare your people, O Lord,
and do not make your heritage a mockery,
a byword among the nations.
Why should it be said among the peoples,
'Where is their God?'"

Psalm 103:8-14

8 The Lord is full of compassion and mercy, *
slow to anger and of great kindness.
9 He will not always accuse us, *
nor will he keep his anger for ever.
10 He has not dealt with us according to our sins, *
nor rewarded us according to our wickedness.
11 For as the heavens are high above the earth, *
so is his mercy great upon those who fear him.
12 As far as the east is from the west, *
so far has he removed our sins from us.
13 As a father cares for his children, *
so does the Lord care for those who fear him.
14 For he himself knows whereof we are made; *
he remembers that we are but dust.

THE EPISTLE

2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10

We entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. For he says,

”At an acceptable time I have listened to you,
and on a day of salvation I have helped you.”

See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation! We are putting no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; in honor and dishonor, in ill

repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see-- we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

THE GOSPEL

Matthew 6:1-6,16-21

Jesus said, "Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

"So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

"And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

"And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

REFLECTION

by

Norm Wright



Unlike this cold start to Lent, on a rainy day in first or second week of Lent 2009 I heard what I took to be a true sign of Spring's arrival, a distant thunder clap that slowly rumbled into silence. It awakened in me a sense of what Lent (Spring) is all about and led me to write the following poem:

O thunderous Lent, that awakens Earth from its winter-sleep,
That dissolves the pall of sleet and now in foggy mists and pattering rains:
That makes the ground fragrant before leaf and bud appear,

That fans chilled air to warmth by the winged beat of returning bird, and
Marks the end of death and life's return;

O thunderous Lent, awaken the human soul from its wintry slumber
Dissolve the pall of its certainty within the mists of Mystery
and the waters of Truth;

Arouse it with the fragrance of life yet to be seen;
Warm it with the winged beat of a loving heart, and
Mark it for resurrection, to Life returned..

Ash Wednesday is about wakening the human soul from its slumber, to take an account of itself and rend one's self open to both the mystery and the truth that we are part of something bigger than the sum of our parts, something bigger than the sum of us all. We share in our being the substance which makes up every being; the solar ash and the cosmic dust that resulted in the formation of earth and permeates all of life which emerged from its primal sludge.

Ash Wednesday reminds us that our time on this planet is short; that life as we know it will come to an end and our physical bodies will return to the dust and ash it proceeded from.

Ash Wednesday reminds us that our fasting is not meant to be a show or a demonstration of what we can live without but rather, as Paul's second letter to the Corinthians reminds us, what we can live with in order to avoid becoming an obstacle to the grace of God offered to others. In that letter, fasting is cast as endurance of the hardships that life brings; an endurance grounded in "purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God."

Ash Wednesday is both a sober and liberating moment at the beginning of Lent:

Sober - in the sense that we take a serious look at ourselves and consider deeply what we are doing with our transient lives, where we have been and where we are going; what we have done and what we have left undone. Our consideration is liturgically aided by the Litany of Penitence which serves as a checklist of things we should be thinking about on this day and every day going forward.

Liberating - in the sense that this service is like an annual spiritual exam in which we ask God in Psalm 51 to check us out, to find what is true in us and purge us from what is not; to create in us clean hearts that pulses with love and renewed spirits that refresh us with life-giving breath.

In this unusual time where we are socially distanced, we miss out on the imposition of ashes in the shape of a cross on our foreheads. We miss the human touch of someone imposing on us a greater reality contained in the symbolism of that smeared-on, ashen cross. So let us, on this day, spiritually receive the imposition of that ashen cross on our hearts and minds to not only remind us that we are dust and to dust we will return, but also to remind us that we are marked for resurrection - to Life returned. Amen.

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Dear People of God: The first Christians observed with great devotion the days of our Lord's passion and resurrection, and it became the custom of the Church to prepare for them by a season of penitence and fasting. This season of Lent provided a time in which converts to the faith were prepared for Holy Baptism. It was also a time when those who, because of notorious sins, had been separated from the body of the faithful were reconciled by penitence and forgiveness, and restored to the fellowship of the Church. Thereby, the whole congregation was put in mind of the message of pardon and absolution set forth in the Gospel of our Savior, and of the need which all Christians continually have to renew their repentance and faith.

We are invited, therefore, in the name of the Church, to the observance of a holy Lent, by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God's holy Word. And, to make a right beginning of repentance, and as a mark of our mortal nature, let us kneel before the Lord, our maker and redeemer.

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Almighty God, you have created us out of the dust of the earth: Since we cannot receive the imposition of ashes at this time, we are mindful of our mortality, our need for penitence, and that it is only by your gracious gift that we are given everlasting life; through Jesus Christ Our Savior. Amen.



Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.

PSALM 51

Miserere mei, Deus

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your
loving-kindness; *
in your great compassion blot out my offenses.

Wash me through and through from my wickedness *
and cleanse me from my sin.

For I know my transgressions, *
and my sin is ever before me.

Against you only have I sinned *
and done what is evil in your sight.

And so you are justified when you speak *
and upright in your judgment.

Indeed, I have been wicked from my birth, *
a sinner from my mother's womb.

For behold, you look for truth deep within me, *
and will make me understand wisdom secretly.

Purge me from my sin, and I shall be pure; *
wash me, and I shall be clean indeed.

Make me hear of joy and gladness, *
that the body you have broken may rejoice.

Hide your face from my sins *
and blot out all my iniquities.

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

Cast me not away from your presence *
and take not your holy Spirit from me.

Give me the joy of your saving help again *
and sustain me with your bountiful Spirit.

I shall teach your ways to the wicked, *
and sinners shall return to you.

Deliver me from death, O God, *
and my tongue shall sing of your righteousness,

O God of my salvation

Open my lips, O Lord, *
and my mouth shall proclaim your praise.

Had you desired it, I would have offered sacrifice, *
but you take no delight in burnt-offerings.

The sacrifice of God is a troubled spirit; *
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

LITANY OF PENITENCE

Most holy and merciful Father:

We confess to you and to one another,
And to the whole communion of saints
In heaven and on earth,
That we have sinned by our own fault
In thought, word, and deed;
By what we have done, and by what we have left undone.

We have not love you with our whole heart, and mind, and strength. We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We have not forgiven others, as we have been forgiven.
Have mercy on us, Lord.

We have been deaf to our call to serve, as Christ served us.
We have not been true to the mind of Christ. We have grieved your Holy Spirit.
Have mercy on us, Lord.

We confess to you, Lord, all our past unfaithfulness: the pride, hypocrisy, and impatience of our lives.
We confess to you, Lord

Our self-indulgent appetites and ways, and our exploitation of other people
We confess to you, Lord.

Our anger at our own frustration, and our envy of those more fortunate than ourselves,
We confess to you, Lord.

Our intemperate love of worldly goods and comforts, and our dishonesty in daily life and work,
We confess to you, Lord.

Our negligence in prayer and worship, and our failure to commend the faith that is in us,
We confess to you, Lord.

Accept our repentance, Lord, for the wrongs we have done: for our blindness to human need and suffering, and our indifference to injustice and cruelty,
Accept our repentance, Lord.

For all false judgments, for uncharitable thought toward our neighbors, and for our prejudice and contempt for this who differ from us,
Accept our repentance, Lord.

For our waste and pollution of your creation, and our lack of concern for those who come after us,
Accept our repentance, Lord.

Restore us, good Lord, and let your anger depart from us;
Favorably hear us, for you mercy is great.

Accomplish in us the work of your salvation,
That we may show forth your glory in the world.

By the cross and passion of your Son our Lord,
Bring us with all your saints to the joy of his resurrection.



May Almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us all our sins through our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen us in all goodness and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep us in eternal life. Amen

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