

ASH WEDNESDAY



Cleanse Our Hearts

Merciful Lord,
your will is that all people know your
gracious love
in the depths of their being.
Look upon your people with patience
as they strive to live the love you have
shown us.
Keep us steadfast in prayer.
Help us to persevere in our fasting
and abstinence.

Inspire us to be generous in our almsgiving.
Cleanse our hearts during this
penitential season.
When we turn away from you frightened,
tired, or frustrated by our failures,
fill us with joy in the salvation you have
given us,
that we might renew our efforts
and praise your saving power.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Wednesday, February 26, 2020

Now Is the Time



Today's Readings: Joel 2:12–18; Psalm 51:3–4, 5–6ab, 12–13, 14 and 17; 2 Corinthians 5:20—6:2; Matthew 6:1–6, 16–18. “Rend your hearts.” Lent is a time to offer our hearts to God, who will tear vice and sin out of us. At times, the process is painful. We are so attached to our sins that they become a habit. It took a crisis to compel Joel and his people to look inward and discover how they had taken God for granted. Both the crisis and the confession of sin were painful.

St. Paul reminds us why we confess our sins: God has made us righteous in Christ. We are in a radically new relationship with God. The strength of this relationship overcomes every obstacle because God works within us and even through us, extending his gift of reconciliation to others.

If we do not live this gift of gracious love, however, we will lose it. The time to act is now.

By praying, fasting, and giving alms, we practice living out the reconciliation God offers. These and other acts of piety strengthen our relationship with God. We give alms to acknowledge that all we have is from God and we need nothing more. We pray to express our love for God and to know God’s love for us. We fast without gloomy looks because we hunger for God. We are overjoyed that God frees us from sin and death and draws us into life with him. The joy of knowing God’s love for us helps us persevere in our Lenten walk.



THIS WEEK AT HOME

Monday, February 24

Prayer

Jesus rebukes his disciples for not having enough faith to cast out a demon. Our prayer might also feel weak and ineffectual. Lent is a time to persist when we feel like failures at prayer. Lent may also be a time for us to learn new ways of praying and being with God. St. James urges us to be humble and patient. God wants to fill us with holy gifts. How will you enrich your prayer life this Lent? *Today's Readings: James 3:13–18; Psalm 19:8, 9, 10, 15; Mark 9:14–29.*

Tuesday, February 25

Almsgiving

St. James describes an alarming situation in which members of the community are so caught up in the things of this world that they neglect God and cause division. Jesus' disciples, in turn, betray their preoccupation with status. When we generously donate our money and time, we begin freeing ourselves from an attachment to worldly things. We also remind ourselves that such things are impermanent. All that we will have in the end is God—or nothing at all. What charity will you offer this Lent? *Today's Readings: James 4:1–10; Psalm 55:7–8, 9–10a, 10b–11a, 23; Mark 9:30–37.*

Wednesday, February 26

Fasting

In a culture that extols immediate gratification, the ancient practices of fasting and abstinence seem strange and pointless. When undertaken with prayer, however, they become deeply meaningful. When we fast and abstain from meat, we deepen our awareness of our mortality. We express our spiritual hunger for God. We distinguish wants from needs. We join our small sacrifices to Christ's great one. Fasting and abstaining also joins us with others the world over who ask God to cleanse their sinful hearts. *Today's Readings: Joel 2:12–18; Psalm 51:3–4, 5–6ab, 12–13, 14 and 17; 2 Corinthians 5:20–6:2; Matthew 6:1–6, 16–18.*

Thursday, February 27

A Better Life

As the Israelites prepare to enter the Promised Land, Moses reminds them of all that God has done and all that God asks of them. If they obey God, God will bless them and they will thrive in their new homeland. Jesus calls us to follow him in self-giving love. It's hard for us to obey. We persevere in faith, hoping that our new way of living will lead to the future we truly want. Reflect on how your Lenten promises will bring you closer to God. *Today's Readings: Deuteronomy 30:15–20; Psalm 1:1–2, 3, 4 and 6; Luke 9:22–25.*

Friday, February 28

Beyond Fasting

God's people complain that despite their fasting and ritual practices God does not do their bidding. The prophet replies that they are concerned about themselves and not the well-being of others. When people ask Jesus why his disciples do not fast, he points out that God has come to his people, so they should celebrate. One group fasts for selfish reasons while the other fasts but fails to see God's coming. How can your practice of fasting and abstinence help you better see both God and the needs of others? *Today's Readings: Isaiah 58:1–9a; Psalm 51:3–4, 5–6ab, 18–19; Matthew 9:14–15.*

Saturday, February 29

Feasting with the Lord

It's not easy to turn from our interests to follow the Lord, yet Isaiah continues to urge us to act with justice and compassion. When Jesus calls Levi to embrace the demands of discipleship, Levi promptly obeys. The new disciple even throws a party. Levi understands that despite the challenge, discipleship brings us into the presence of our Lord. Choose a moment from your day and celebrate how God is with you. *Today's Readings: Isaiah 58:9b–14; Psalm 86:1–2, 3–4, 5–6; Luke 5:27–32.*

