



Ash Wednesday



“Memento, homo, quia pulvis es, et in pulverem reverteris.”

(Remember, O man, that dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return.)

**A Meditation on the
The Gospel for Ash Wednesday
March 5th, A.D. 2014**

The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew; Chapter 6, Verses 16 - 21

**(1928 Book of Common Prayer – Page 125)
(The People's Anglican Missal – Pages A-61 & A- 62)
The Missal in Latin and English – Newman Press, 1958 ed. - Page 110**

Gospel Summary: Jesus gives directions for fasting: it should be done, not to win praise from man, but from God.

WHEN YOU FAST

Our Blessed Lord, Jesus, knows human nature so well! How fitting is the advice about the manner of fasting at the beginning of Lent ! We aren't going to fast and abstain, and we won't be going through the first day of Lent without being tempted to think that we are close to being great saints. Those thoughts may be familiar to many of us!

Jesus tells us: When you fast, don't go around telling everybody either by word, or by your long sad face (attempting to appear pious). Don't *pretend* to be some kind of ascetic. Now, the reader might reply, ' doesn't our Lord want us to fast ?' We shouldn't try to excuse ourselves from acts of mortification. What our Lord wants from us is *sincerity*. Christ wants us to mortify ourselves, but He wants to see our mortifications not as an end ... but as a means to an end.

Jesus speaks to us also through today's Epistle reading on the meaning of fasting: “ *Turn ye even to me, saith the Lord, with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping and with mourning : and rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God.*” (Joel, Chap. 2, Vss 12-13)

HAVE MERCY ON US

This is what our Lenten lives must be: being converted to Christ, turning to Christ, our God. We must first, turn away from *ourselves in order to turn toward Him*. It is only then that we will experience the truth that He is “*gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness and repenteth him of the evil.*” (Epistle; Joel, Ch. 2, Vs).

Fasting then is the symbol of our turning away from self and self-centeredness. It is also the guarantee of final success, for the end of our Lenten fasting will be to so live in Christ that His mind and His will become ours.

3.

“ Lord, Thou hast mercy upon all, overlooking the sins of men for the sake of repentance, and sparing them: because Thou art the Lord our God. O God, have mercy upon me ; for my soul trusteth in Thee. “ - (Wisdom, Ch. II – Introit Prayer for Ash Wed.)

O Lord Jesus, help us to keep our fasting sincere so that by it we may learn that Thou art the Lord our God. Not food, or drink, or my own will, but Thou. *“O Lord, my God, I cried unto thee, and thou hast healed me.” (Ps. 30 – Offertory Prayer for Ash Wednesday.)*

Prayer for the Day: DO NOT LAY UP TREASURES ON EARTH.

A Prayer for the Lenten Season

O most mighty God, and merciful Father, Who hast compassion upon all men, and hatest nothing that Thou hast made ; receive and comfort all who are grieved and wearied with the burden of our sin ; give us unfeigned repentance for all the errors of our life past, and steadfast faith in Thy Son JESUS ; that our sins may be done away by Thy mercy, and our pardon sealed in heaven, before we go hence and are no more seen. Amen.

Feasts, Fasts, and Other Things

Ash Wednesday



Remember, man, that thou art dust, and into dust thou shalt return

Ash Wednesday is a universal day of penitence which, depending on the date of Easter, may fall between February 4th and March 11th. Ash Wednesday derives its name from the rite of *ashing*, that is, sprinkling on the head, or the imposition on the forehead in the form of a cross, blessed ashes made from burnt branches of palm, olive, or evergreens, according to the region, carried the previous year in Palm Sunday processions. To each penitent, recalling God's admonition to Adam when he expelled him and Eve from the Garden of Eden, the celebrant says: ' Remember man, that dust thou art and to dust thou shalt return.'

Ashes and sackcloth were biblical symbols of repentance. “*I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes*” cried Job, sorrowful because he had questioned the inscrutable ways of God; and the king of Nineveh took off his robe, and put on sackcloth and sat down in ashes when he called upon his people to renounce their evil ways. An early Jewish purification rite which used ashes of a red heifer without fault or blemish was seen to be perfected in Christ who, blameless as he was, offered himself to purge the consciences of sinners so that they could all serve the living God (*see Heb. Ch. 9, Vss 13-14*). In this sense, ashes, as well as denoting repentance, also symbolize salvation through Christ's sacrifice of Himself on the Cross.

Ancient Ash Wednesday Rituals

There were two very old ceremonies which took place in churches on Ash Wednesday which are worthy and interesting to share; *The Reception of Penitents* and *The Ejection of Penitents*.

Reception of Penitents: A requirement of the early medieval penitentiary code was that grave sinners who had been excluded from the sacraments, but were deemed ready to seek forgiveness, should come barefoot to church on the first day of Lent, Ash Wednesday. After they had expressed their sorrow they had ashes sprinkled on their heads, or were handed a sackcloth garment covered with ashes, and were sent away to perform their allotted penances. Their relatives, who felt themselves contaminated by their kinsfolk's fall from grace, usually accompanied them and many voluntarily submitted to some form of discipline, wearing the sackcloth in private or, as in some parts of Germany, accepting the garment at a public ceremony. When frequent private confessions and shriving became more common, the individual use of sackcloth declined, and instead, the whole congregation was washed. This rite was known to Aelfric (955 – c. 1020), the great Benedictine scholar, and was adopted in Rome about this same time. The Council of Benevento in 1091 decreed that everyone, laity and clergy should receive ashes on the First day of Lent.

Ejection of the Penitents: This ceremony is of great antiquity in the Church dating from around the 4th century and was practiced generally until about the 12th or 13th centuries, with many exceptions all the way up to the 16th. After the blessing and imposition of ashes by the celebrant, usually the highest ranking cleric or bishop, those people in the parish who had committed a grave public sin were bound to submit to public penance at the beginning of Lent, on Ash Wednesday. This penance consisted in exclusion from the community's Eucharistic services, but also included the practice of performing works of *satisfaction, mortification, prayer, and fasting*. This rite of exclusion from Church, known as *The Ejection of the Penitents*, began with the penitents receiving the penitential garb in a solemn ritual and having their heads strewn with ashes; and then the bishop accompanied them to the gate of the church. We have an account from a *Sarum Processional; (Salisbury Diocese, England)* from about the 12th or 13th century:

“*This finished (The Blessing and distribution of the ashes) ...Let the Procession set forth through the middle of the choir with Cerofers and Thuriblers, without a Cross, to the Western door of the Church, the more dignified going first, preceded by an ash-colored standard, where the Penitents should be thrust out by the Officiator with his right hand by the ministry of some priest handing each (penitent) to him ; and each kissing his hand. This, if the Bishop be present, should be done by him, in the interim two responsories begun by the Precentor, were sung without the 'Gloria Patri'. ... Then, the Church door should be closed and the Procession return in the usual manner.*”

5.

This form was found in all the English uses, and similar ceremonies took place in Rouen Cathedral and other churches in France in the eleventh century all the way down to the time of the writer Auger De Moleon Granier (1600 - 1652). De Moleon records that this Penitential discipline was practiced in his time, and in 1697, no less than forty penitents were thus ejected. The same was still being practiced in Siena, Italy in 13th century accounts.

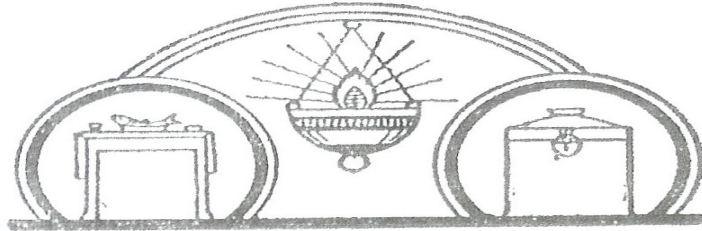


“Ejection of the Penitents on Ash Wednesday ”
woodcut image from an old pontifical

This “expulsion” was a very moving ceremony and served as a stern warning to all the faithful. As centuries passed, the Church began to mitigate her penitential discipline, and various penances were now assigned in secret. The faithful at large have voluntarily dedicated themselves to the practice of penance by receiving the sacred ashes since the middle ages. Nobles, kings, and emperors, for example Charlemagne, joined with the common throng and barefoot (and sometimes in sackcloth), asked to be signed with the sacred dust.

A vestige of this ancient ceremony is still practiced in Anglo-Catholic parishes, where a solemn procession takes place before the principal Sunday Mass begins. The Litany from the Book of Common Prayer is said or chanted by the choir and people, with the procession being led by candle bearers and a thurifer, making for a solemn yet profound scene. The procession wends its way around the church as long as it takes for the Litany to be recited, and at the end, everyone retires to their appointed stations, while the priest, at the foot of the sanctuary, leads the concluding prayers. This is done traditionally, every Sunday in Lent. The practice of expulsion from the church has long since been abandoned, but this bit of ceremony is most relevant to us as a weekly reminder as to the temper of the Penitential Season.

The Three Principle Lenten Practices



The illustration above represents the three principal Lenten practices recommended by the Church: **Prayer**, (the burning lamp), **Fasting** (the fish), and **Almsgiving** (the locked alms-box).
Fish, bread, and wine, likewise point to the Holy Eucharist ... nourishment for the soul.

Practices in Practice

“ If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us ; but if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”
(1 St. John; Chap. 1, Vss 8 & 9)

Lent (The name of Lent comes from the Old English “*lencten*” meaning “ springtime ”). The focus of this season is *the Cross* and penance, *penance, penance*; as we imitate Christ's forty days of fasting, like Moses and Elias before Him, and await the triumph of Easter. We *fast, abstain, and mortify the flesh, give alms, and think more of charitable works.*

We should awake each morning with the thought in our hearts of : ***How might I make amends for my sins? How can I serve God in a reparative way? How could I be of service to others today?***

We also practice mortifications by “giving up something” that would be a sacrifice to do without. The sacrifice could be anything from desserts (sweets), television, traveling for pleasure, etc. It can entail too, taking on something unpleasant that we would normally avoid, for example, going out of one's way to do another's chores, performing “random acts of kindness” (a phrase so often seen on bumper stickers!), and so forth. A good practice might be to help some, especially small children begin their own Lenten practices of self-sacrifice.

Due to the focus on penance and reparation, it is traditional to make sure that we go to Confession at least once during this Season to fulfill the precept of the Church that we go to Confession *at least* once a year (Traditionally, private confessions should be made in Advent and Lent as a *minimum*.)... and receive Holy Communion at least once during Eastertide.

A beautiful old custom is associated with Lenten Confession. Before going to see the priest to make your Sacramental confession, bow before each member of the household and to any you've sinned against, and say, "*In the Name of Christ, forgive me if I've offended you*" One responds with: "*God will forgive you.*" When done with an extensive examination of conscience and a sincere heart, this practice can be quite healing. Confessing one's sins to a priest is a Sacrament which remits both mortal and venial sins. Confessing sins to those you've offended is a sacramental which, like all sacramentals one piously takes advantage of as it remits venial sins. It's important also to understand, that when the *General Confession* is made at Mass, this is only for the remission of venial sins ... mortal sins, and those that weigh heavy on one's conscience, need to be absolved through the *Sacrament of the Confessional*.

In addition to mortification and charity, seeing and actually living Lent as a forty day spiritual retreat is a very good thing to do. Spiritual reading should be taken on (perhaps serving as a small sacrifice to reading for pleasure) over and above ones regular daily spiritual readings. (If one does not have a daily spiritual reading routine, Lent is a great time to begin it and stay with it the rest of the year!) Holy Scripture is always a primary source for spiritual devotional reading. It's recommended that one chose a chapter and break it down with the idea of working through that chapter for Lent. The process of slow, deliberate, and prayerful reading is known as *lectio divina* (*divine reading*), which will be spoken about at another time. Other good books or authors that can be read at Lent might be: **The Ascent of Mount Carmel** by St. John of the Cross, **The Introduction to a Devout Life**, by St. Francis de Sales, **The Story of A Soul**, by St. Therese of Lisieux, **The Spiritual Castle**, by St. Theresa of Avila, **The Soul of the Apostolate** by Abbot Chautard, "**The Mystery of Lent**" from: **The Liturgical Year**, by Dom Gueranger, books by Abbot Marmion, and your writer's favorite author, St. Alphonsus Ligouri.

As to prayer, praying the beautiful **Seven Penitential Psalms; (Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143** in the Anglican Psalter) . . . (**Psalms 6, 31, 37, 50, 101, 129, and 142** in some Roman Catholic Psalters.) is a traditional Lenten practice. It's traditional to pray one of these psalms for each day of the week and meditate upon it. If time is a problem, you could pray them all on Fridays in Lent, or as there are seven of them and seven Fridays in Lent, pray one psalm each Friday. These psalms, which include the Psalms "**Miserere**" - **Psalm, 51 (50)** and "**De Profundis**" - **Psalm 130 (129)**, are perfect expressions of contrition and prayer for mercy. So apt are these psalms at expressing contrition that, as he lay dying in A.D. 430, St. Augustine asked that a monk write them in large letters near his mat so he could easily read them.

Another great prayer for this season is that of St. Ephraim, a Doctor of the Church (d. 373). This prayer is often prayed with a *prostration* or a *profound bow* after each stanza:

*O Lord and Master of my life, take from me the spirit of sloth,
despondency, lust of power, and idle talk;*

- - - - -

*But grant rather the spirit of chastity, humility,
patience, and love to thy servant,*

- - - - -

*Yea, O Lord and king, grant me to see my own transgressions,
and not to judge my brother,
for blessed art Thou unto the ages of ages.*

8.

In the Eastern Church, this prayer is prayed liturgically during Lent and is followed by “*O God, cleanse me a sinner*” prayed twelve times, with a bow following each, and one last prostration.

Another pertinent prayer that we can include in our Lenten devotions comes to us from ancient monastic sources; that of reciting the “*En ego, O bone et dulcissime Jesu*” (*Prayer Before a Crucifix*) before an image of Christ crucified:



*“Behold, O kind and most sweet Jesus,
I cast myself upon my knees in Thy sight,
and with the most fervent desire of my soul I pray and beseech Thee that Thou wouldst impress upon
my heart lively sentiments of Faith, Hope, and Charity, with true repentance for my sins, and a firm
desire of amendment, whilst with deep affection and grief of soul I ponder within myself and mentally
contemplate Thy five most precious wounds; having before my eyes that which David spoke in
prophecy of Thee, good Jesus: “They have pierced my hands and feet; they have numbered all my
bones.”*”

Last, we can't finish without speaking about praying the holy Rosary in Lent. The recitation and meditation of the *Sorrowful Mysteries* is most fitting to do during the week-days, with the recitation and meditation of the *Joyful Mysteries* on Saturdays, and the *Glorious Mysteries* on Sundays.

The Church offers special services for the faithful to attend throughout the Lenten period, thereby enriching and benefiting their spiritual journey. Depending upon the size of the parish, services will vary in number and frequency, but they generally are these (but not limited to): *Stations of the Cross, Benediction and Adoration of the Most Blessed Sacrament, Rosary Devotions, Bible Studies {focusing on the Passion of Christ or pertinent Lenten topics}, Confessions, Great Litany Processions before Mass, Spiritual Conferences, “Stone Soup Suppers” [A delightful form of fellowship where a light collation of soup and bread are served followed by a short presentation pertinent to the season],* to name just a few. Most parishes will publish their schedules well in advance in their bulletins for those to make their plans accordingly.

The Lenten Fast

“ And Jesus was led by the spirit into the desert, to be tempted by the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterwards he was hungry.” - (Matt. Ch. 4, Vss. 1-2)

Before I speak at any length about the Lenten Fast, it might be helpful to our readers if I presented some definitions as well as what parameters are entailed in this forty-day period of fasting and abstinence.

Abstinence – In both the Latin and the Traditional Anglican Churches, abstinence means refraining from eating the meat from mammals or fowl, and from soup and gravy made from them. Fish is allowed, hence Fridays have been called “Fish Fridays.” Traditionally, the laws of abstinence apply to all aged 7 and over.

Partial Abstinence – Meat and soup or gravy made from meat may be eaten once a day at the principal meal.

Fasting – Fasting is the taking of only one full meal (which *may* include meat) and two smaller, meatless meals that don't equal the large one meal. No eating between meals is allowed, but water, milk, tea, coffee, and juices are O.K. **Meat is allowed at one meal** (assuming abstinence isn't also expected on a given day. Traditionally everyone over 21 years of age and under 59 years of age is bound to observe the laws of fast. The present code of Canon Law for Roman Catholics sets the ages of 18 & 59 as the limits.

Note: These definitions are for use in secular Parishes and Dioceses. The definitions vary widely within various monastic orders and houses.

Lenten Fast Calendar - This is based on the Traditional Calendar and practices, and not the 1983 Code of Cannon Law (an FYI to our Roman Catholic readers.):

Ash Wednesday: Fast and Abstinence.
All days of Lent: (Monday thru Wednesday, Thursday & Saturday.....)..... Fast and Partial Abstinence.
Fridays in Lent:.....Abstinence on Fridays even if you don't abstain on all other Fridays.
Ember days in Lent: Fast and Abstinence.
Sundays in Lent:Not a fast or abstinence day, but moderation is encouraged.
Laetare (Rose or 'Refreshment') Sunday:..... Fast & Abstinence lifted,..... eat refreshingly!
Good Friday: Fast and Abstinence.
Holy Saturday: Fast and Abstinence until the Vigil Mass of Easter.

If you are following the traditional path, it might be easier to follow through on these disciplines if one just decides to *fast and abstain* on all the days mentioned. Remember simply to “ ***Eat no more than one regular meatless meal and two smaller meatless meals that don't equal the larger meal on all the days marked on the Calendar – and, No snacking !*** may be easier to memorize than the chart!

10.

On those days of **Fast and Abstinence**, meatless soup with a slice of bread is traditional. Sundays, of course are always free of fasting and abstinence; even in the heart of Lent, Sundays are about the glorious Resurrection. However, moderation should be the watchword. This pattern of fasting and abstinence ends after the *Vigil Mass of Easter on Holy Saturday*.

Special Lenten foods including vegetables, seafoods, salads, pastas, and beans mark the Season, in addition to the meatless soups. Fasting even precluded the eating of eggs and fats (recall Shrove Tuesday practice of cooking up a pile of pancakes? ...yum!) in the Middle Ages. The chewy pretzel became the bread and symbol of the times. Did you know that they have always been a Christian food, even since Roman times? Their very shape being a creation of the monks (clever fellows if I do say so! - *ed.*) The three holes in a pretzel represent the Holy Trinity, and the twists of the dough represent the arms of someone praying. In fact the word '*pretzel*' is a German word deriving itself ultimately from the Latin "*bracellae*" meaning "*little arms*"! The Vatican Library has the oldest known representation of a pretzel found on a 5th cent. Manuscript.

The age-old tradition of "*pretzels and beer*" goes back also to monastic times. The Cistercian Monks of the Middle Ages were known to practice great austerities in their daily living. Their observances became almost superhuman in Lent, as they not only practiced great acts of self-denial and mortification...in addition to their daily round of heavy manual labor. The Cistercians began to brew beer in order to not break the Lenten fast as well as their rule. It was called "*Refectory Beer*". This was consumed at the one meal of the day in the monastery along with bread (or a pretzel). The ingredients gave the monk the needed calories to maintain the energy needed to perform his duties without collapsing (which still happened a lot!). The alcohol content was low so inebriation was not a problem. Today, the Cistercians still brew beer (mostly in Europe), but now sell to the public to gain income. Our dear friends at St. Joseph's Abbey in Spencer, MA, USA have become the first Cistercian Monastery in the U.S. to brew and sell beer, so soon we will be able to taste what the monks for many ages consumed. It is hoped that our dear Father Prior will bring some of this wonderful beer back to the Priory upon his return from his next visit there! (Hint! - *ed.*)

Please note that in following these disciplines designed to make one mindful of Christ's sacrifice, to put the world into perspective, and to discipline the body, *true* charity trumps every other law. Catholic Christians are not Pharisees. In other words, if you are invited to a sit-down dinner at a friend's house who is not Catholic, and your host unaware of Catholic practices, has worked hard to prepare a huge roast beef dinner, eat the beef and be quiet! Your charity honors the hospitality and generosity of your host, and that's a Christian thing to do.

This same charity applies to you as well. If in the course of a demanding and crazy day (who doesn't have them these days?!) you truly forget that it is a "Fish Friday" and find yourself eating up a big juicy steak, just stop eating the steak, take it home in a 'doggie bag' and have it on Sunday, or feed it to your dog...who'll love you for that! Point is, if the *will* is not involved, there is no culpability (although it's a good personal reminder to pay closer attention to the calendar!).

We fast for many reasons. Even if there were no other reason to fast, we fast out of obedience: Our Lord and His Apostles did, and tell us to. We also fast to discipline the body so that we can focus more intently on the spiritual.

11.

Perhaps St. Basil the Great said it best:

*“ Let us fast an acceptable and very pleasing fast to the Lord.
True fast is the estrangement from evil-
Temperance of the tongue,
Abstinence from anger,
Separation from desires, slander, falsehood, and perjury.
Privation of these things is true fasting.*

Almsgiving

“ Give alms of thy substance ; and when thou givest alms, let not thine eye be envious, neither turn thy face from any poor, and the face of God shall not be turned away from thee.” - (Tobit; Ch. 4, Vs. 7).

The act of giving to the poor, in the most ancient tradition of the Church, is an expression of penance. A form of piety, a witness of fraternal charity and an expression of Lenten conversion. Therefore, all Christians are urged to support generously the charitable works of the Church, including the regular stewardship to their parish, and support of diocesan needs. Many of our Traditional Anglican dioceses and parishes operate on a shoestring as it is, and any generous contributions made in the spirit of Lenten Alms giving would accomplish wonders. Within most jurisdictions there are also active outreaches to the poor and the missions. These, too are very worthy places in which to send monies that we have set aside during Lent that we may otherwise have put towards, dinners, hobbies, amusement, and the like.

Another act of giving, is that of self. Visitation of the sick, or the aged, the needy, or those in prison, and in other ways. Fasting and abstinence together with the works of charity help Catholics live in solidarity with our crucified Lord as reflected in the image of our own brothers and sisters who suffer every day.

Father Prior has allowed this writer to share quite a lot of information regarding Ash Wednesday and the opening days of the Lenten season in this missive. It is our hope that this has been informative and helpful to our readers who are seeking to make the most of their individual Lenten experiences from both common and ancient Lenten traditions. Catholics, (Anglican and Roman), are blessed with a great treasury of practices and traditions which have great and relevant meaning even in this supposed “enlightened” twenty-first Century. These have been hallowed by centuries of use by our pious and saintly fore bearers. We unite ourselves with them in spirit, by the restoration and application of these venerable traditions, and we unite ourselves as Catholics, which is pleasing to our Lord Jesus Christ. As sinners, we ought to be overwhelmed by the knowledge that we are loved unconditionally by an all powerful Lord Who loves us for love's sake...in spite of ourselves. Putting our “best foot forward” is the least we can do in thanks, and in honor of Him who through His Passion...makes all things new.

A most hallowed, blessed, and prayerful Lenten journey to all our dear readers.

- Br. Chip, O.S.B.

12.



Feasts, Fasts, and Other Things; from “*The Chipmunks Nutshell Library*” presented & edited by *Br. A. Chip Monk, O.S.B. A monk of Our Lady of Seven Sorrows Priory, in Raymond, Maine.*

Fr. Prior Kevin is available for hearing Confessions throughout Lent. He is available at the Priory by appointment or will come to parishes with permission of the reverend clergy. You can reach him by email at; klamarre@maine.rr.com or by phone at 207-655-4441 (leave message)



“The Symbols of Ash Wednesday”

