

# Church of the Good Shepherd and St. John the Evangelist

Ash Wednesday  
March 1, 2006  
Fr. Bill McGinty

## **“Repent and believe in the Gospel!”**

In the 12 century there lived a man called Thomas Becket. Thomas was a scholar and from a wealthy family. Unexpectedly, he was chosen as the Archbishop of Canterbury. He was chosen because he was a mild mannered, kindly and holy person. The King, Henry II, favored his appointment because he wanted no opposition to appointing all the Bishops for England and Wales himself.

But when Thomas became Archbishop not only did he prove to be outstanding in the job, but he was also courageous and said “No” to the King. He would appoint his own Bishops.

Henry sent 4 knights to the Cathedral in Canterbury to pressure Thomas. The knights in anger killed Thomas at the foot of the altar steps turning him into a martyr.

Thomas was so well loved that an outcry swept across the land from North to South. Henry feared for his throne. He put on rags for clothes and covered his face in ashes and paraded himself through the streets of London, where people pelted him with rotten fruit and eggs.

Just how sorry Henry was is hard to say, but its one of the classic examples of ashes being used to show repentance.

I used to hate Lent, especially when I was young. It was dull, boring and most of all long. and that despite the fact that I really had nothing to repent of. Now that I am a lot older I love Lent, particularly because I have a lot to repent of, and Lent helps me do it.

Do you ever drive along in the car and replay chunks of your life and wish that you could go back and relive them? And not just relive them, but live them better and not make the same mistakes.

Well, even Lent will not allow you to do that. The past is the past and it stays unchanged, but Lent will let you accept the past, own the past and find peace with the past. The past is what formed you into the person you are today, and that includes the bad times along with the good. Sometimes the last person we think of forgiving is ourselves. Lent allows us to do that.

The reason is, because Jesus told us about his Father. He said that God when he forgives us, binds up all our sins and throws them into the deep of the ocean.

Martin Luther protested against the sale of indulgences in 1517 because he believed that the practice undermined the theology of the cross.

“Don’t you know,” he said, “that when Christ died for us, he died for all our sins. To think that we need to pay something for salvation, is to say that Jesus’ sacrifice was not enough.”

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The picture that Jesus paints of God is one of a Father who loves his children and will do anything to unite with them and forever. Lent tells each one of us “Your salvation is not in doubt. Believe that Christ has saved you.”

This came across to me very powerfully one day driving to work through the Catskills. I had been thinking of how much I loved my own child, when it occurred to me how much Jesus was loved by his Father. Yet, the Father gave us his son that we might be saved. I tried to fathom it for a moment, but it was too overwhelming and I found myself weeping. Which of us would give up our own child? I know the answer was, ‘none of us. It should tell us something about God’s love.

Lent tells us, God has that love for each of us also. Lent tells us “believe and know you are saved.” And because you are a child of God’s love, you will want to repent.

Lent is that time to grow in God’s love. Let us extend that love to those around us, especially in our families.

Amen+

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