

Ash Wednesday  
February 25, 2009  
Fr. Bill McGinty

## **“Ash Wednesday 2009”**

Welcome to Lent. For the next forty days we are invited to live a closer and more intimate way with the Lord. Lent challenges each one of us to reflect on our lives and decide those areas in which we fall short as true Disciples of Christ.

Lent asks us tough questions: “Do we pray enough, give enough, forgive enough, love enough, sacrifice enough and prepare enough for the Kingdom to come?”

In Jesus’ teaching he speaks of two kinds of Kingdoms. First he tells his disciples about God’s Kingdom, the Kingdom we are called to after death. Theologians call that the Eschatological Kingdom of heaven because it exists in the next life. More often, however Jesus teaches about the realized Kingdom, the Kingdom that he is building now, here, on earth, the Kingdom of service to the less fortunate, the Kingdom that becomes his church.

Building that Kingdom is what we as Christians are all about. It is a legacy that has been handed down to us. St Paul calls it ‘Living the Spirit.’ “When you live the Spirit,” he says, “you will put up with any hardship for the sake of the Gospel.” When you live in the Spirit anger has no place in your life. Christians living in the Spirit practice patience, understanding, forgiveness, tolerance love and forbearance. Without nurturing these virtues we cannot come close to be the Kingdom that Jesus teaches.

Lent is that Christian time when we find a quiet place to re-evaluate ourselves. It is the time for that 100,000 mile service. It is the time for putting the brakes on our own sinfulness. To receive the forgiveness of Christ, to benefit from the grace of Christ’s cross, is to first acknowledge ourselves as sinners. That acknowledgement, that examination, should enter every facet of our lives from our need to embrace people of every diversity, to respect for authority. We owe it to ourselves, our children and our country to respect the President of the United States of America, members of Congress and those who govern the Nation. We owe to our Bishop and Clergy the acknowledgement that they have been called by God and in the first instance serve Christ and his Gospel. We owe to our Vestry as a deep appreciation for their work and service.

In doing so we show ourselves to be on the side of God and truth. “What would Jesus do” is the question every true disciple must ask themselves.

Christians do not lie, deceive, hate, despise, instead their prayer of faith begins with humility. Traditionally, Christians used Lent to strip their lives of deception and all that took them away from the truth of the Gospel. They used Lent to reform their lives. Movies, concerts, frivolity disappeared in favor of prayer, penance, fasting and sacrifice. Lent has often been called a desert experience or a little death.

Of old, we used to ask ourselves the question: “If I should die, what would the state of my soul be?” Wearing ashes on this Ash Wednesday asks us the exact same question. It tells us: “Remember that you are dust and to dust you will surely return.” We all go down into the grave. In Lent we do it in a symbolic way, knowing that that grace is a reality in our future.

Real as it may be, Easter comes to bring us hope. Hope is what this Parish and our Parishioners are all about. We are about redemption and we are about Resurrection. The signs of Resurrection are all around us; in the Child Care that refused to die, in a Stain glass window that lay buried for 36 years, in a pipe organ and choir that re-appeared after fifteen years, in a food pantry that transformed itself to meet the needs of our economic crisis.

None of that will matter unless we continue that redemption and resurrection into our personal life. Prayer, duty, service are components of being a good parishioner. They hold us to a higher standard; they call us to worship and fellowship in this season of Lent.

Amen+