

LENT: JOURNEYING TO THE CROSS

Ash Wednesday
February 17, 2010

Joel 2:1-2, 12-17 or Isaiah 58:1-12
Psalm 51:1-17
2 Corinthians 5.20b—6:10
Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Is This the Fast ...

Ash Wednesday, the first day in Lent is a season the church has traditionally set apart for self reflection in preparation for the celebration of the resurrection of Our Lord on Easter Sunday. Ash Wednesday is a day to remember our mortality; from dust we came and to dust we shall return.

Our morality is the result of our sin. When our first parents ate of the fruit of the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, they died and death reigned over all of creation. Remembering our mortality is a good way to begin a season of repentance.

During Lent many people seek to practice some of the spiritual disciplines, particularly fasting. Even those who do not attend church regularly consider giving something up for Lent, thinking that somehow God will be pleased with them. The problem is that God does not work like that; our good works do not move him. Salvation comes to us by grace through the cross of Jesus Christ.

The people of Isaiah's day thought that, if they just fasted, all would be well with them. They fasted, but without repentance. They sought the Lord daily and wondered why God did not hear their prayers. The problem was that their actions did not reveal repentant hearts. They continued to abuse their workers, and take advantage of the poor in their midst. God would not listen to or answer their prayers.

God demands that we obey him; love him with our whole being and love our neighbor as our self. This season as we seek the Lord's forgiveness, some might even fast, let us concentrate on living lives of obedience to the word of God by dealing kindly with those we come in contact with. Sacrifice is good but obedience is better.

The Reflection for Ash Wednesday was prepared by the Rev. David Haberer, Pastor of Church for All Nations which reaches out to the world from the heart of New York City. Visit: www.CFAN.net to learn more about this ministry. Pastor Haberer is an ordained minister with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

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Today we remember to pray for the opportunity to begin this season of Lent by reflecting on the true meaning of the season. Merciful God, teach us humility and true repentance, and grant us forgiveness through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Activity Corner: Psalm 51 Litany

Supplies needed: Bible; writing paper; pens or pencils (or type the psalm and the litany response on a computer and print out copies for each member of your household).

Ask each one to copy the psalm with the litany response or distribute typewritten copies. Divide the reading into seven sections as follows and invite different members of your household to read the assigned verses: 1-2; 3-5; 6-9; 10-12; 13-14; 15-17; 18-19. At the end of each section, invite all family members to respond together, "CREATE IN ME A CLEAN HEART, O GOD." Use the psalm as a prayer throughout the Lenten season during family devotional time.

"Spiritual Nourishment" Calendars

Supplies needed: Bible; photocopies of 8-1/2 x 11 calendar pages (with boxes for each date) for the months of February, March and April 2010; pens or pencils.

Read Isaiah 58 and reflect on what the prophet says about "true fasting." The season of Lent offers us a disciplined time to reflect on choices we make each day in light of how those choices may or may not nourish our spiritual life. People often talk about things they plan to "give up" for Lent; i.e., sweets, watching television, etc. Invite members of your household to think about what they can "take on" or ways they plan to choose to expand their opportunities for spiritual nourishment; i.e., daily Bible reading, volunteering for acts of service within the community, etc.