

ASH WEDNESDAY – 22 FEBRUARY 2023

Joel 2: 12 – 18; Psalm 51: 3 – 6, 12 – 14, 17; 2 Corinthians 5: 20 – 6:2;
Matthew 6: 1 – 6, 16 – 18

Theme: Lent is a time to Fast, Pray and Love.

Reflection:

The Holy Season of Lent inaugurates the preparation for the great Season of Easter. Ash Wednesday launches the Lenten Season with ashes on our foreheads, a sombre reminder of our identity and origin. This most intriguing ritual speaks a language of the heart. It is the poetry of the soul speaking to the depths of the human spirit. It is a spiritual adventure meant to help us rediscover and prepare our souls for the desert journey of temptation, suffering and death. The ancient wisdom of the Hebrew Scriptures echo and resound with the Ash Wednesday mantra, **“Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return.”** These words awaken us to the reality of our lives as mortal beings hence the first reading from the Prophet Joel exhorts us to a new life in the Lord, **“... return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and tear your hearts not your garments.”** Our return to the Lord will make us **“ambassadors of Christ ... reconciled to God” (Corinth 5:20).** This time of conversion has alternative slogan coined from the lips of the Lord, **“Repent and believe in the Good News.”** This invitation is a paradigm shift, a metanoia, an interior conversion that is facilitated by the three pillars that Jesus suggested for a healthy spirituality; the giving of alms, praying and fasting done with integrity and authenticity that comes from a transformed heart **(Matt 6:1 – 6; 16 – 18)**. In Hollywood therefore, our Lenten Movie would be entitled, **Fast, Pray and Love: Putting God First.** Lent is therefore a spiritual and liturgical reminder of the centrality of God in the Christian life.

Family Reflection Question:

1. What are you going to *“let go”* of during this Lenten season?
2. How are you going to intensify your Lenten Spiritual Reading?
3. How will you ensure that your Lenten journey goes beyond this particular season?

THURSDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY – 23 FEB 2023

Deuteronomy 30: 15 – 20; Psalm 1: 1 – 4, 6; Luke 9: 22-25

Theme: Lent is a season of self-sacrifice and self-denial.

Reflection:

The Word of God calls us to make a fundamental choice for God. During this holy season of Lent we are reminded of the spiritual truth that every choice is a renunciation. This means that, whenever we do not choose God, we are renouncing Him. This is writ large in **Deuteronomy (30:15)** when Moses presented the decisive moment of choice for Israel, in these words, **“See, I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil.”** This was a turning point in the life of Israel. Lent is the spiritual turning point for each of us. It is the time to choose the *‘road less travelled’* as the poet Robert Frost puts it. This Lenten spiritual path is a choice that is challenging us to go against the grain. Jesus puts it thus to his disciples, **“If anyone would come after me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.”** This Christian invitation of self-denial is opposed to the human temptation of self-indulgence which is a dominant trait in the popular culture of postmodern life, which is a society without God, where there is no need for sacrifice. In a world without sacrifice, we become infested with a virus of corruption that motivates many people to become wealthy at the expense of the poor. The human desire for wealth is insatiable as we can see in the cases of corruption in the Zondo Commission. As a South African society we have to do better. Our future depends on us kicking the habit and addiction to corruption. We have to create a new nation of men and women who are committed to healing our land.

Family Reflection Question:

1. What is the role of Christian families in a culture and climate of selfishness, self-interest and corruption?
2. In your work environment or school environment how are you practicing integrity, self-sacrifice and self-denial?
3. *How will you carry your cross every day this Lenten Season?*

FRIDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY – 24 FEB 2023

Isaiah 58: 1 - 9; Psalm 51: 3 – 6, 18 – 19; Matthew 9: 14-15

Theme: Lent a time of fasting that leads to transformation.

Reflection:

The spirituality of fasting *‘in the time of Lent is the expression of our solidarity with Christ.’*¹ We are in solidarity with Christ when we identify with the cross. This includes the Lenten Devotions of reflecting on the Stations of the Cross and meditating on the sorrowful mysteries of the holy Rosary. Fasting is one of the pillars of our Lenten practice that is continually inviting us to conversion. Fasting is not just a physical experience but a deeply spiritual practice. In the Catholic Tradition, fasting is done on Wednesdays and Fridays particularly during Lent. In the days of the prophet Isaiah fasting was also an important part of the religious and spiritual way of life. But unfortunately the prophet realised that external fasting did not always lead to internal conversion, in other words, fasting done out of duty was not transformative. Hence the Prophet Isaiah (58:6-7) makes it clear that it is transformative and authentic fasting that brings happiness to the vulnerable people and liberates the underprivileged and heals the afflicted. It brings about justice and human dignity for all. In the Gospel, Jesus argues that there is no need for His disciples to fast because He is the ultimate presence of God bringing mercy and healing in the land. During this Lenten Season we are invited to true fasting that leads to radical conversion, interior transformation and repentance that can be seen in an authentic life of transparency and integrity.

Family Reflection Statements:

1. *How can your fasting during Lent change and challenge our attitudes towards the underprivileged and the vulnerable?*
2. *True Fasting is seen in our fight against injustice and our ability to stand for what is right and true in society.*
3. *How can your fasting transform your attitude to power as manipulation and domination to service and ministry?*

SATURDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY – 25 FEB 2023

Isaiah 58: 9 – 14; Psalm 86: 1 – 6; Luke 5: 27-32

Theme: Lent is a time to realise how Mercy rewrote our lives.

Reflection:

There is gospel song by Jimmy Swaggart, entitled Mercy Rewrote My Life. It speaks of a life that encountered the Mercy of God and was transformed. Jesus is the Mercy of God, therefore when He saw a man who wanted to repent, that was a game changer. Levi, the tax collector had this life-changing encounter with the Mercy that rewrote his life. This is the experience of all those who have allowed Christ, the Mercy of the Father to rewrite their lives. They sing the conclusion of the Psalm of today’s Liturgy, ***“O Lord, you are good and forgiving, full mercy to all who call to you. Give ear, O Lord, to my prayer, and attend to my voice of supplication.”***

They reflect on the poetic imagery from the prophet Isaiah, ***“then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday... you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.”***

Levi, the tax collector allowed the beauty of being seen by Jesus to awaken in him his true self. That is why Jesus spent his time with sinners so that He can help them rediscover their true selves and through repentance they receive from Christ the grace of dying to their false selves (who they think they are). When Jesus sees us, we recover who we truly are in Him.

Family Reflection Question:

1. *How can we learn to see the best in each other and particularly in the most vulnerable and poor members of our society?*
2. *When was the last time you told your loved one the good news of their true selves in Christ?*
3. *When was the last time you told yourself the good news about yourself to improve your self-esteem and image?*

¹ **Saint Pope John Paul II** – Wednesday General Audience– 21 March 1979