

# Ash Wednesday - 03012017

**Ash Wednesday**  
**Lectionary: 219**

## **Reading 1** [Jl 2:12-18](#)

Even now, says the LORD,  
return to me with your whole heart,  
with fasting, and weeping, and mourning;  
Rend your hearts, not your garments,  
and return to the LORD, your God.  
For gracious and merciful is he,  
slow to anger, rich in kindness,  
and relenting in punishment.  
Perhaps he will again relent  
and leave behind him a blessing,  
Offerings and libations  
for the LORD, your God.

Blow the trumpet in Zion!  
proclaim a fast,  
call an assembly;  
Gather the people,  
notify the congregation;  
Assemble the elders,  
gather the children  
and the infants at the breast;  
Let the bridegroom quit his room  
and the bride her chamber.  
Between the porch and the altar  
let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep,  
And say, "Spare, O LORD, your people,  
and make not your heritage a reproach,  
with the nations ruling over them!  
Why should they say among the peoples,  
'Where is their God?'"

Then the LORD was stirred to concern for his land  
and took pity on his people.

## **Responsorial Psalm** [Ps 51:3-4, 5-6ab, 12-13, 14 and 17](#)

R. (see 3a) **Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.**  
Have mercy on me, O God, in your goodness;  
in the greatness of your compassion wipe out my offense.  
Thoroughly wash me from my guilt

and of my sin cleanse me.  
**R. Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.**  
For I acknowledge my offense,  
and my sin is before me always:  
"Against you only have I sinned,  
and done what is evil in your sight."  
**R. Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.**  
A clean heart create for me, O God,  
and a steadfast spirit renew within me.  
Cast me not out from your presence,  
and your Holy Spirit take not from me.  
**R. Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.**  
Give me back the joy of your salvation,  
and a willing spirit sustain in me.  
O Lord, open my lips,  
and my mouth shall proclaim your praise.  
**R. Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.**

## **Reading 2** [2 Cor 5:20—6:2](#)

Brothers and sisters:  
We are ambassadors for Christ,  
as if God were appealing through us.  
We implore you on behalf of Christ,  
be reconciled to God.  
For our sake he made him to be sin who did not  
know sin,  
so that we might become the righteousness of God  
in him.

Working together, then,  
we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in  
vain.  
For he says:

*In an acceptable time I heard you,  
and on the day of salvation I helped you.*

Behold, now is a very acceptable time;  
behold, now is the day of salvation.

## **Verse Before the Gospel** [see ps 95:8](#)

If today you hear his voice,  
harden not your hearts.

## **Gospel** [Mt 6:1-6, 16-18](#)

## Ash Wednesday - 03012017

Jesus said to his disciples:

"Take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them; otherwise, you will have no recompense from your heavenly Father.

When you give alms, do not blow a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets to win the praise of others.

Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward.

But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing, so that your almsgiving may be secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you.

"When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners so that others may see them.

Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward.

But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you.

"When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites. They neglect their appearance, so that they may appear to others to be fasting. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to be fasting, except to your Father who is hidden. And your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you."

## Ash Wednesday

The word "Lent" comes from an old English word which means "springtime" so it reminds us of spring cleaning and the new life in nature during spring. This season of Lent is a time of special grace for us in which we want to do some spring cleaning in our lives and enjoy new life as a result.

Therefore we have come here today to acknowledge that we are sinners. We want to clean up our lives during Lent. We want to leave sin behind and grow closer to the Lord. We want a change of heart this Lent.

The words of the Lord through the prophet Joel in our first reading are words that have special significance for us today as we begin this season of Lent and are words that we can easily see the Lord speaking to us personally,

"Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with your whole heart, with fasting, and weeping, and mourning; Rend your hearts, not your garments, and return to the Lord, your God.

## Ash Wednesday - 03012017

For gracious and merciful is he,  
slow to anger, rich in kindness,  
and relenting in punishment.”

(Joel 2:12-13)

The words of Paul in our second  
reading to the Corinthians are also  
very relevant for us as we begin  
this season of Lent,

We implore you on behalf of Christ,  
be reconciled to God. For our sake  
he made him to be sin who did not  
know sin, so that we might become  
the righteousness of God in him. (2  
Cor. 5:20-21)

In the Scriptures when people left  
sin behind and turned over a new  
leaf they used ashes to symbolize  
their repentance. Job said, “I  
disown what I have said, and  
repent in dust and ashes.” (Job  
42:6) Daniel “turned to the Lord  
God, pleading in earnest prayer,  
with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes.”  
(Dan 9:3) Jesus said, “Woe to you,  
Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida!  
For if the mighty deeds done in  
your midst had been done in Tyre  
and Sidon, they would long ago  
have repented, sitting in sackcloth  
and ashes.” (Matt 11:21; Luke  
10:13). Therefore in a spirit of

repentance we will take take ashes  
on our foreheads.

Sometimes people ask, “What are  
you doing for Lent?” There is one  
thing to give up during Lent – sin.  
This season of Lent is a preparation  
for renewing our baptismal  
promises during the Easter Vigil on  
Holy Saturday night. Paul says,  
when writing to the Romans (6:3-  
6), that when we were baptized we  
died to our old way of life to live a  
new way of life i.e. when we were  
baptized we died to our old sinful  
ways, we left sin behind. Therefore  
Paul says that when we were  
baptized we went into the tomb  
with Jesus and rose out of the  
tomb again with Jesus to a new  
life. The season of Lent is to give  
us time once again to die to our old  
sinful ways and rise out of the  
tomb with Jesus to a new way of  
life so that by the Easter Vigil on  
Holy Saturday night when we  
renew our baptismal vows we will  
also have renewed our lives. That  
is why the First Preface of Lent  
says,

Each year you give us this joyful  
season  
when we prepare to celebrate the

## Ash Wednesday - 03012017

paschal mystery  
with mind and heart renewed.

In our second reading Paul wrote to the Corinthians not to receive the grace of God in vain (2 Cor. 6:1). During Lent this year let us too not receive the grace of God in vain.

To show that we are serious about overcoming sin we do penance. Our penance during Lent as well as being a small attempt at reparation for our sins is a symbol of the change of heart we want to achieve. In the Gospel today (Matt 6:1-6, 16-18) Jesus spoke about prayer, fasting and giving alms. Since the early centuries these are three practices the Church has encouraged us to undertake during Lent as a form of penance: praying more, fasting and giving alms to the poor.

- We fast today and on Good Friday and abstain from meat on the Fridays of Lent. In a spirit of repentance we have always fasted from one of our favorite foods for the entire season of Lent. It is a way of showing that we love the Lord

more than food and that we love the Lord more than sin.

- There are many ways of giving alms. In helping other people we also love the Lord.
- I hope Lent may also be for you a time of growing closer to the Lord by spending more time in prayer. This would also be a good time to renew praying the Rosary daily if you have been neglectful. Reading the Bible and reading spiritual books are also a great help.

I wish you a holy season of Lent, a joyful season of Lent, a time in which you grow closer to the Lord and leave sin behind. The Lord comes to us with a different grace in each season. May the grace God gives us during this season of Lent not be in vain. I conclude with a prayer,

Lord,  
protect us in our struggle against evil. As we begin the discipline of Lent, make this season holy by our self-denial...the rest ad lib...