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Ash Wednesday (A) — Violet

February 22, 2023

Ash Wednesday signals Aspringtime. The Church marks with ashes of burnt blessed palms the beginning of Lent (an old English word for spring), the season when nature gets greenest and trees and plants bloom. How can there be blooming in a season when Holy Mother Church asks us to practice temperance, mindfulness, and self-denial? Ah, the gems of wisdom that have inspired many believers of the Judeo-Christian faith are what the Word of God teaches us today.

**Opening to God.** The prophet Joel, in the First Reading, before the prospect of impending destruction, urges everyone to return to the Lord with fasting, weeping, and mourning. It must be an opportune time that the elders and even infants and newlyweds who are excused from fasting must seize—to come back to God who is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love (Jl 2:13b).

In olden times, Jews poured ashes on their heads as they put on sack cloth to express contrition and mourning. And today, ashes speak of our being mortals, of being fragile and limited, and this recognition makes us long for the immortal, the totally other Divine whose innate nature is to reach out to others.

Paul, in the Second Reading, quotes the Septuagint of Is 49:8 on the Lord's favor, saying, "Now is a very acceptable time... the day of salvation" (2 Cor 6:2). We always remind ourselves that God never tires of calling us back; we only need to open ourselves to God, in God's own time.

**Rend Your Hearts.** The prophet Joel calls us to rend our hearts, not

## REND YOUR HEARTS; LET YOUR GOODNESS



### **Bro. Hansel B. Mapayo, SSP**

our garments (Jl 2:13a). Huh... how? The Responsorial Psalm points out how. "Behold, you desire true sincerity; and secretly you teach me wisdom" (Ps 51:8). The wise person follows the Word of God. Jesus' teaching about fasting, prayer, and almsgiving urges us to internalize the spirit of these selfless acts and not emphasize the external display and glory they may bring. He calls us to be truly authentic in our religious expression. As trees shed their leaves in autumn, making the soil fertile, we also rid ourselves of excesses and luxuries, especially our selfish tendencies, and draw sustenance from the Lord who enriches us in our simplicity as we daily relate with him in prayer in the secret rooms of our hearts. Humus that we are, we humbly bow before the Lord of mercy and forgiveness.

Jesus never dispenses with these three pillars of Jewish spirituality. Recall that occasion when Jesus is invited to dinner at a Pharisee's house (Cf. Lk 11:37 ff). When the

issue of external ritual cleansing is emphasized rather than the inner disposition of people, Jesus expresses his dismay and proceeds to point out the self-righteous attitudes of people. He condemns hypocrisy at the outset. And what is a concrete way he proposes to overcome this? Addressing the host Pharisee who is particular with ritual cleanliness, Jesus says, "But as to what is within, give alms, and behold, everything will be clean for you" (Lk 11:41). Fasting, abstinence, and prayer that demand us to be selfless and others-oriented are our means of deepening our relationship with God.

**Let Goodness Bloom.** Almsgiving is a very concrete way towards holiness when acted upon with the right disposition. Furthermore, in the Second Reading, Paul exhorts us to be instruments of giving—of giving ourselves in reconciliation just as Jesus has reconciled us with God, a selfless act. "For our sake he made him to be sin [or sin-offering] who did not know sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him" (2 Cor 6:21). When our consciousness begins to open to this great love of Jesus and having been inspired by his action, we also begin to love others, day by day—showing only goodness from our hearts, where charity begins. We act charitably when out of love of God, we love our neighbors and creation in our own little ways.

We walk humbly before God (Mic 6:8), live simply, and charitably let goodness bloom in our broken, wounded world. Tending ourselves begins now as we allow *Kuwaresma* to lead us to the journey of authenticity.

## THE INTRODUCTORY RITES

### Entrance Antiphon

(Cf. Wis 11:24,25, 27)

(*Recited when there is no opening song*)

**You are merciful to all, O Lord, and despise nothing that you have made. You overlook people's sins, to bring them to repentance, and you spare them, for you are the Lord our God.**

### Greeting

(*The sign of the cross is made here*)

**P**—The Lord be with you.

**All**—**And with your spirit.**

### Introduction

(*These [or similar words] may be used to address the assembly.*)

**P**—Ash Wednesday opens the season of Lent, which prepares us for the celebration of the Paschal Mystery—the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The beginning of Lent is marked by the distribution of ashes to signify our mourning or contrition for our sins. This sign of penance, however, should be accompanied by inner conversion, by “*metanoia*” or change of mind and heart.

(*The Penitential Act and the Gloria are omitted.*)

### Collect

**P**—Let us pray. (*Pause*)

Grant, O Lord, that we may begin with holy fasting this campaign of Christian service, so that, as we take up battle against spiritual evils, we may be armed with weapons of self-restraint.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.

**All**—**Amen.**

## LITURGY OF THE WORD



### First Reading (Jl 2:12–18) (*Sit*)

*The words of the prophet Joel tell us that we should return to the Lord because he is gracious and merciful.*

*He forgives us our transgressions and gives us healing.*

### A reading from the Book of the Prophet Joel

**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.

—The word of the Lord.

**All**—**Thanks be to God.**

### Responsorial Psalm (Ps 51)

**R**—**Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.**

Sr. M. C. A. Parco, FSP



**1.** 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)**

**2.** 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)**

**3.** 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)**

**4.** 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)**

### Second Reading

(2 Cor 5:20–6:2)

*The apostle Paul reminds us that the Holy Spirit dwelling in us makes us God's temple. If we are God's holy dwelling, we ought to respect and love each other.*

### A reading from the Second Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians

**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.

—The word of the Lord.

**All**—**Thanks be to God.**

### Verse before the Gospel

(Cf. Ps 95:8) (*Stand*)

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

### Gospel (Mt 6:1–6, 16–18)

**P**—A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew  
**All**—**Glory to you, O Lord.**

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.”

—The Gospel of the Lord.

**All—Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

**Homily** (*Sit*)

**Blessing of Ashes** (*Stand*)

**P**—Dear brethren (brothers and sisters), let us humbly ask God our Father that he be pleased to bless with the abundance of his grace these ashes, which we will put on our heads in penitence.

*(After a brief prayer in silence, and, with hands extended, the celebrant continues:)*

O God, who desire not the death of sinners, but their conversion, mercifully hear our prayers and in your kindness be pleased to bless + these ashes, which we intend to receive upon our heads, that we, who acknowledge we are but ashes and shall return to dust, may, through a steadfast observance of Lent, gain pardon for sins and newness of life after the likeness of your Risen Son.

Who lives and reigns with you for ever and ever.

**All—Amen.**

*(He sprinkles the ashes with holy water in silence.)*

**Distribution of Ashes**

*(The priest places the ashes on the forehead of those who come forward, saying to each: Repent, and believe in the Gospel. Or: Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return. Meanwhile, appropriate songs are sung.)*

**Prayer of the Faithful**

**P**—Brethren, today, the Father calls us towards repentance for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand. With humility we turn back to God as we say:

**R—Father, reconcile us to your love.**

**C**—For the Church: grant Pope Francis, bishops, priests, deacons, and the lay faithful, repentant hearts as we begin the Lenten season. We pray: **(R)**

**C**—For all who serve in the government: grant them hearts sensitive to your mercy and compassion so that they too may render merciful and compassionate service to their countrymen. We pray: **(R)**

**C**—For many of us gathered today: may we find consolation as we reflect on our own shortcomings to you, Father, and to each other. We pray: **(R)**

**C**—For the poor, the oppressed, and other minorities: may this time of repentance unite us again with our brethren who suffer the most. We pray: **(R)**

**C**—For our departed loved ones:

welcome them back into your communion. We pray: **(R)**

**C**—Let us pray for the urgent concerns of our community and our personal intentions (*pause*). We pray: **(R)**

**P**—Father, reconcile us to your love as we prepare ourselves for the remembrance of your Son’s passion, death, and resurrection.

We ask this through the same Christ our Lord.

**All—Amen.**



**Presentation of the Gifts**

*(Stand)*

**P**—Pray, brethren...

**All—May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands for the praise and glory of his name, for our good and the good of all his holy Church.**

**Prayer over the Offerings**

**P**—As we solemnly offer the annual sacrifice for the beginning of Lent, we entreat you, O Lord, that, through works of penance and charity, we may turn away from harmful pleasures and, cleansed from our sins, may become worthy to celebrate devoutly the Passion of your Son.

Who lives and reigns for ever and ever

**All—Amen.**

**Preface** (*Lent IV*)

**P**—The Lord be with you.

**All—And with your spirit.**

**P**—Lift up your hearts.

**All—We lift them up to the Lord.**

**P**—Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**All—It is right and just.**

**P**—It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks, Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God.

For through bodily fasting you restrain our faults, raise up our minds, and bestow both virtue and its rewards, through Christ our Lord.

Through him the Angels praise your majesty, Dominions adore and Powers tremble before you. Heaven and the Virtues of heaven and the blessed Seraphim worship together with exultation. May our voices, we pray, join with theirs in humble praise, as we acclaim: **All—Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of hosts. Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.** *(Kneel)*

**Acclamation** *(Stand)*

**All—When we eat this Bread and drink this Cup, we proclaim your Death, O Lord, until you come again.**

**THE COMMUNION RITE**

**The Lord's Prayer**

**All—Our Father...**

**P—Deliver us, Lord...**

**All—For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours now and forever.**

**Invitation to Peace**

**Invitation to Communion**

*(Kneel)*

**P—Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb.**

**All—Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.**

**Communion Antiphon**

*(Cf. Ps 1:2-3)*

**He who ponders the law of the Lord day and night will yield fruit in due season.**

**Prayer after Communion**

*(Stand)*

**P—Let us pray. *(Pause)***

May the Sacrament we have received sustain us, O Lord, that our Lenten fast may be pleasing to you and be for us a healing remedy.

Through Christ our Lord. **All—Amen.**



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**THE CONCLUDING RITES**

**P—The Lord be with you. All—And with your spirit.**

**Solemn Blessing**

**P—Bow down for the blessing. *(Pause)***

Turn your people to you with all their heart, O Lord, we pray, for you protect even those who go astray; but when they serve you with undivided heart, you sustain them with still greater care.

Through Christ our Lord. **All—Amen.**

**P—And may the blessing of almighty God, the Father, and the Son, + and the Holy Spirit, come down on you and remain with you for ever.**

**All—Amen.**

**Dismissal**

**P—The Mass is ended. Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life.**

**All—Thanks be to God.**

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