

Sts. Peter and Paul Evangelical  
Lutheran Church  
250 Woodside Road  
Riverside, Illinois 60546  
Telephone: (708) 442-5250  
Parsonage: (708) 442-0238  
Fax: (708) 442-5264

Web page: [www.stspeterandpaulriverside.org](http://www.stspeterandpaulriverside.org)  
Email address: [www.stspeterandpaulriverside.org/service](mailto:www.stspeterandpaulriverside.org/service)

**Dennis J. Lauritsen, Pastor**  
**David B. Richards, Parish Musician**  
**Karen Rouleau, Administrative Assistant**



## PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

*During the Prayers of Intercession, you are invited to add your own prayer(s) either in speech or in silence as indicated by the line: "Other intercessions may be added here." You may wish to use this insert to write down your prayer(s) which you may then offer aloud during that time. If you wish to have your prayers added to the Prayer of the Church during the coming weeks, please remove and place this card in an offering plate.*

---

---

---

## THE SEASON OF LENT

When Christianity was new, still resonating with its Jewish roots, the year revolved around a Passover re-tuned by the resurrection. The history of God's saving ways, the ancient story of the release and rescue from Egypt was infused with this new chapter of God's saving intervention in Jesus, the long-promised Messiah. The tempo and flow of the annual holy days carried over easily.

So Lent became the time of preparation for the greatest holy day of all—Easter. New believers were prepared in the weeks preceding the celebration of the resurrection to enter into the community of faith. Lent was a time, therefore, of awakening and emerging. In the Northern Hemisphere, the seasons of creation undergirded this deep metaphor. Spring slowly unfolded during Lent, buds gathered strength and winter's dormancy eased as the weeks went by.

Lent has become a time to face the truth of our humanity, our utter inability to be God, and our inability to believe that God is. Our human limitations get us into all kinds of trouble, seizing up our relationships with ourselves, with each other, and with the earth itself. In our desperate attempts to measure up to what we imagine we ought to be or in our fatalistic abandonment of the gifts God has given us, we deny our limitations and/or the miracle we are. Unable to hold these two polarities in tension, we wreak havoc in our relationships and on the earth.

It is for this we need salvation by the one who is without limits and who also loves us beyond measure. Ash Wednesday begins Lent by forcing our eyes open to our failings. Whose interest do we really serve? Do we loose the bonds of injustice? Undo the thongs of the yoke? Let the oppressed go free? Share our bread with the hungry? Bring the homeless poor into our homes? Cover the naked? If not, we do not offer the worship God most welcomes and values. If not, we serve our own interests, not God's. Because we do not, our churches are bare; our vestments are dark.

If we are to begin the journey toward life and be able to welcome the Messiah, we must begin in this place, clear about how far God must come to meet us. The smear of ashes borne on our foreheads speaks of our mortality, our frailty, and our own undoing. Our forebears remembered Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. It was the one day the Hebrew high priest could enter the temple's Holy of Holies, bearing in his body the repentance of the nation. It was the day to stand before God, vulnerable and stripped of pretense. It is how we begin Lent, the season of awakening.

*Reprinted from Words for Worship, copyright 2003 Augsburg Fortress.  
Used by permission of Augsburg Fortress.*

ASH WEDNESDAY  
FEBRUARY 17<sup>TH</sup>, 2021 ✚ 7:15 P.M.

*Lent begins with a solemn call to fasting and repentance as we begin our journey to the baptismal waters of Easter. As we hear in today's readings, now is the acceptable time to return to the Lord. During Lent the people of God will reflect on the meaning of their baptism into Christ's death and resurrection. The sign of ashes suggests our human mortality and frailty. What seems like an ending is really an invitation to make each day a new beginning, in which we are washed in God's mercy and forgiveness. With the cross on our brow, we long for the spiritual renewal that flows from the springtime Easter feast to come.*

---

**HOLY COMMUNION**  
**WITH CORPORATE CONFESSION AND IMPOSITION OF ASHES**

*\*—those who are able may stand.*

**GATHERING**

---

*The congregation remains seated.*



**CALL TO WORSHIP**

See, now is the acceptable time.  
See, now is the day of salvation.  
For the sake of Jesus Christ, let us be reconciled to God.

**For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin,  
so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.**

*Prayed by leader.*

To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.

O my God, in you I trust;  
let me not be put to shame;  
let not my enemies exult over me.

Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame;  
they shall be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.

Make me to know your ways, O Lord;  
teach me your paths.

Lead me in your truth and teach me,  
for you are the God of my salvation;  
for you I wait all the day long.

Remember your mercy, O Lord, and your steadfast love,  
for they have been from of old.

Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions;  
according to your steadfast love remember me,  
for the sake of your goodness, O Lord!

Good and upright is the Lord;  
therefore he instructs sinners in the way.

He leads the humble in what is right,  
and teaches the humble his way.

All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness,  
for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.

For your name's sake, O Lord,  
pardon my guilt, for it is great.

Who is the one who fears the Lord?  
Him will he instruct in the way that he should choose.

His soul shall abide in well-being,  
and his offspring shall inherit the land.

The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him,  
and he makes known to them his covenant.

My eyes are ever toward the Lord,  
for he will pluck my feet out of the net.

Turn to me and be gracious to me,  
for I am lonely and afflicted.

The troubles of my heart are enlarged;  
bring me out of my distresses.

Consider my affliction and my trouble,  
and forgive all my sins.

Consider how many are my foes,  
and with what violent hatred they hate me.

Oh, guard my soul, and deliver me!  
Let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in you.

May integrity and uprightness preserve me,  
for I wait for you.

Redeem Israel, O God,  
out of all his troubles.

*A time of silence is observed following the psalm.*

## INVITATION TO LENT

Friends in Christ, today with the whole church we enter the time of remembering Jesus' passover from death to life, and our life in Christ is renewed. We begin this holy season by acknowledging our need for repentance and for God's mercy. We are created to experience joy in communion with God, to love one another, and to live in harmony with creation. But our sinful rebellion separates us from God, our neighbors, and creation, so that we do not enjoy the life our creator intended.

As disciples of Jesus, we are called to a discipline that contends against evil and resists whatever leads us away from love of God and neighbor. I invite you, therefore, to the discipline of Lent—self-examination and repentance, prayer and fasting, sacrificial giving and works of love—strengthened by the gifts of Word and sacraments. Let us continue our journey through these forty days to the great Three Days of Jesus' death and resurrection.

*Silence for reflection and self-examination precedes the confession.*

## CORPORATE CONFESSION

*Responses are spoken softly.*

Most holy and merciful Father: We confess to you and to one another, and to the whole communion of saints in heaven and on earth, that we have sinned by our own fault in thought, word, and deed; by what we have done, and by what we have left undone.

We have not loved you with our whole heart, and mind, and strength. We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We have not forgiven others, as we have been forgiven. **Have mercy on us, Lord.**

We have been deaf to your call to serve as Christ served us. We have not been true to the mind of Christ. We have grieved your Holy Spirit. **Have mercy on us, Lord.**

We confess to you, Lord, all our past unfaithfulness. The pride, hypocrisy, and impatience in our lives, **we confess to you, Lord.**

Our self-indulgent appetites and ways, and our exploitation of other people, **we confess to you, Lord.**

Our anger at our own frustration, and our envy of those more fortunate than ourselves, **we confess to you, Lord.**

Our intemperate love of worldly goods and comforts, and our dishonesty in daily life and work, **we confess to you, Lord.**

Our negligence in prayer and worship, and our failure to commend the faith that is in us, **we confess to you, Lord.**

Accept our repentance, Lord, for the wrongs we have done. For our blindness to human need and suffering, and our indifference to injustice and cruelty, **accept our repentance, Lord.**

For all false judgments, for uncharitable thoughts toward our neighbors, and for our prejudice and contempt toward those who differ from us, **accept our repentance, Lord.**

For our waste and pollution of your creation, and our lack of concern for those who come after us, **accept our repentance, Lord.**

Restore us, good Lord, and let your anger depart from us.  
**Hear us, Lord, for your mercy is great. Amen**

## IMPOSITION OF ASHES

Almighty God, you have created us out of the dust of the earth. May these ashes be a sign of our mortality and penitence, reminding us that only by the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ are we given eternal life; through the same Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

*Those who desire to receive ashes may come forward by the center aisle. The minister applies ashes to the forehead of each person with the words: "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return."*

*After all who desire ashes have received them, the presiding minister leads the congregation in the conclusion of the confession.*

Accomplish in us, O God, the work of your salvation,  
**that we may show forth your glory in the world.**

By the cross and passion of your Son, our Lord,  
**bring us with all your saints to the joy of his resurrection.**

Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, does not desire the death of sinners, but rather that they may turn from their wickedness and live. Therefore we implore him to grant us true repentance and his Holy Spirit, that those things may please him which we do on this day, that the rest of our life may be pure and holy, and that at the last we may come to his eternal joy; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

*Silence for reflection.*



## \*GREETING

The grace and mercy of God, who in Christ bears our burdens and saves us from sin, be with you all.

**And also with you.**

## \*PRAYER OF THE DAY

Let us pray. Gracious God, out of your love and mercy you breathed into dust the breath of life, creating us to serve you and our neighbors. Call forth our prayers and acts of kindness, and strengthen us to face our mortality with confidence in the mercy of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

## WORD

---

*God speaks to us in Scripture reading, preaching, and song.*

## FIRST READING

Isaiah 58:1-12

*Shortly after the return of Israel from exile in Babylon, the people were troubled by the ineffectiveness of their fasts. God reminds them that outward observance is no substitute for genuine fasting that results in acts of justice, such as feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, and clothing the naked. Sincere repentance will lead to a dramatic improvement of their condition.*

Shout out, do not hold back!

Lift up your voice like a trumpet!

Announce to my people their rebellion,  
to the house of Jacob their sins.

Yet day after day they seek me

and delight to know my ways,

as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness

and did not forsake the ordinance of their God;

they ask of me righteous judgments,

they delight to draw near to God.

"Why do we fast, but you do not see?

Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?"

Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day,

and oppress all your workers.

Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight

and to strike with a wicked fist.



Such fasting as you do today  
will not make your voice heard on high.  
Is such the fast that I choose,  
a day to humble oneself?  
Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush,  
and to lie in sackcloth and ashes?  
Will you call this a fast,  
a day acceptable to the LORD?  
Is not this the fast that I choose:  
to loose the bonds of injustice,  
to undo the thongs of the yoke,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
and to break every yoke?  
Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,  
and bring the homeless poor into your house;  
when you see the naked, to cover them,  
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?  
Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,  
and your healing shall spring up quickly;  
your vindicator shall go before you,  
the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.  
Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer;  
you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.  
If you remove the yoke from among you,  
the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,  
if you offer your food to the hungry  
and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,  
then your light shall rise in the darkness  
and your gloom be like the noonday.  
The LORD will guide you continually,  
and satisfy your needs in parched places,  
and make your bones strong;  
and you shall be like a watered garden,  
like a spring of water, whose waters never fail.  
Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;  
you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;  
you shall be called the repairer of the breach,  
the restorer of streets to live in.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

*The ministry of the gospel endures many challenges and hardships. Through this ministry, God's reconciling activity in the death of Christ reaches into the depths of our lives to bring us into a right relationship with God. In this way, God accepts us into the reality of divine salvation.*

We entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made himself to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. For he says,

"At an acceptable time I have listened to you,  
and on a day of salvation I have helped you."

See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation!

We are putting no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see—we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

\*GOSPEL

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew  
**Glory to you, O Lord.**

*In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus commends almsgiving, prayer, and fasting, but emphasizes that spiritual devotion must not be done for show.*

Jesus said to the disciples: "Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven. So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what

your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

"And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

"And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

## The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, O Christ**

### HOMILY

#### \*HYMN OF THE DAY

*Out of the Depths I Cry to You*  
(Sung by leader.)

- 1 Out of the depths I cry to you;  
O Lord God, hear me calling.  
Incline your ear to my distress  
in spite of my rebelling.  
Do not regard my sinful deeds.  
Send me the grace my spirit needs;  
without it I am nothing.
  
- 2 All things you send are full of grace;  
you crown our lives with favor.  
All our good works are done in vain  
without our Lord and Savior.  
We praise you for the gift of faith;  
you save us from the grip of death;  
our lives are in your keeping.

- 3 In you alone, O God, we hope,  
and not in our own merit.  
We rest our fears in your good Word  
and trust your Holy Spirit.  
Your promise keeps us strong and sure;  
we trust the cross, your signature,  
inscribed upon our temples.
- 4 My soul is waiting for you, Lord,  
as one who longs for morning;  
no watcher waits with greater hope  
than I for your returning.  
I hope as Israel in the Lord,  
who sends redemption through the Word.  
Praise God for grace and mercy!

Text: Martin Luther, 1483-1546; tr. composite

Text © 1978, 2006 Lutheran Book of Worship, admin. Augsburg Fortress.

### \*PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Lord God Almighty, your prophets warn us to tremble at your coming, for it will be a day of darkness and gloom. They urge us to return to you with our hearts, so that our gloom may be turned into the noonday sun, for you are also gracious and merciful. The day of the Lord is coming: **He abounds in steadfast love.**

Have mercy on us, O God, and blot out our sins. Against you and you alone have we sinned, for all our wrong against others is against a beloved child of your own. Create in us new hearts, and put a new and right spirit within us. The day of the Lord is coming: **He abounds in steadfast love.**

Lord Jesus Christ, as fellow servants of God we may be treated as imposters, yet you make us true. We may be accused of being sorrowful, but we rejoice in your presence. We may be pitied because we are seen as poor and having nothing but faith, but you make us rich in the love of God. The day of the Lord is coming: **He abounds in steadfast love.**

Holy Spirit, help us hear the words of Jesus as the Word of God. Help our hearts treasure your presence more than the treasures of the world. When we do find ourselves loving you above all else, help us to be humble in spirit, for it is your gift, not our accomplishment. The day of the Lord is coming: **He abounds in steadfast love.**

We remember all those who have returned to dust, with whom we are one in the body of Christ, especially... . Crush our fear of death, and give us faith to live with courage. The day of the Lord is coming: **He abounds in steadfast love.**

Now is the acceptable time to offer our prayers to you, God of grace and truth. Receive them in your mercy, and grant us all that we need, in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

**\*PEACE**

The peace of the Lord be with you always.  
**And also with you.**

**MEAL**

---

*God feeds us with the presence of Jesus Christ.*

**\*OFFERTORY PRAYER**

Let us pray. God our provider, you have not fed us with bread alone, but with words of grace and life. Bless us and these your gifts, which we receive from your bounty, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

**\*DIALOGUE**

The Lord be with you.  
**And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts.  
**We lift them to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.  
**It is right to give him thanks and praise.**



## \*PREFACE

It is indeed right, our duty and our joy, that we should at all times and in all places give thanks and praise to you, almighty and merciful God, through our Savior Jesus Christ. You call your people to cleanse their hearts and prepare with joy for the paschal feast, that renewed in the gift of baptism, we may come to the fullness of your grace. And so, with all the choirs of angels, with the church on earth and the hosts of heaven, we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

## \*HOLY, HOLY, HOLY

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might:  
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.**

## \*THANKSGIVING AT THE TABLE

Holy God, mighty Lord, gracious Father:  
Endless is your mercy and eternal your reign.  
You have filled all creation with light and life;  
heaven and earth are full of your glory.

We praise you for the grace shown to your people in every age:  
the promise to Israel,  
the rescue from Egypt,  
the gift of the promised land,  
the words of the prophets;  
and, at this end of all the ages, the gift of your Son,  
who proclaimed the good news in word and deed  
and was obedient to your will, even to giving his life.

In the night in which he was betrayed,  
our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks;  
broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying:  
Take and eat; this is my body, given for you.  
Do this for the remembrance of me.

Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks,  
and gave it for all to drink, saying:  
This cup is the new covenant in my blood,  
shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin.  
Do this for the remembrance of me.

For as often as we eat of this bread and drink from this cup,  
we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

**Christ has died.**

**Christ is risen.**

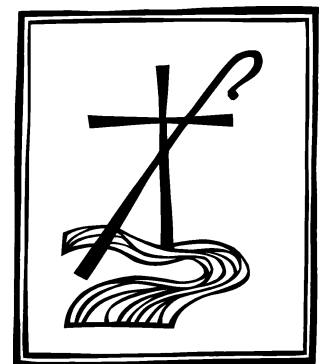
**Christ will come again.**

Therefore, O God, with this bread and cup  
we remember the life our Lord offered for us.  
And, believing the witness of his resurrection,  
we await his coming in power  
to share with us the great and promised feast.  
**Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.**

Send now, we pray, your Holy Spirit,  
that we who share in Christ's body and blood  
may live to the praise of your glory  
and receive our inheritance with all your saints in light.  
**Amen. Come, Holy Spirit.**

Join our prayers with those of your servants  
of every time and every place,  
and unite them with the ceaseless petitions of our great high priest  
until he comes as victorious Lord of all.

Through him, with him, in him,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
all glory and honor is yours, almighty Father,  
now and forever. **Amen.**



**\*LORD'S PRAYER**

*Spoken softly by the congregation.*

Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us.

**Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name,  
thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread;  
and forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those  
who trespass against us;  
and lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
and the power, and the glory,  
forever and ever. Amen**

**\*INVITATION TO COMMUNION**

Return to the Lord with all your heart. Receive bread for the journey and drink for the desert.

DISTRIBUTION

*Agnus Dei*

Wenzel Müller

**\*BLESSING**

The body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen you and keep you in his grace. **Amen**

**\*POST-COMMUNION PRAYER**

Let us pray. Compassionate God, you have fed us with the bread of heaven. Sustain us in our Lenten pilgrimage: may our fasting be hunger for justice; our alms, a making of peace; and our prayer, the song of grateful hearts, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**



## SENDING

---

*God blesses us and sends us in mission to the world.*

### \*BLESSING

May God who has called us forth from the dust of the earth,  
and claimed us as children of the light,  
strengthen you on your journey into life renewed.  
The Lord bless you and keep you.  
The Lord's face shine upon you with grace and mercy.  
The Lord look upon you with favor  
and give you + peace. **Amen.**

\*SENDING HYMN      *On My Heart Imprint Your Image*  
(Sung by leader.)

On my heart imprint your image,  
blessed Jesus, king of grace,  
that life's troubles nor its pleasures  
ever may your work erase.  
Let the clear inscription be:  
Jesus, crucified for me,  
is my life, my hope's foundation,  
all my glory and salvation!

Text: Thomas H. Kingo, 1634-1703; tr. Peer O. Strömme, 1856-1921, alt.

### \*DISMISSAL

Go forth into the world to serve God with gladness;  
be of good courage; hold fast to that which is good;  
render to no one evil for evil; strengthen the fainthearted;  
support the weak; help the afflicted; honor all people;  
love and serve God, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit.  
**Thanks be to God.**

## SERVING IN THE LITURGY

---

PREACHING AND PRESIDING MINISTER

Dennis Lauritsen, pastor

ASSISTING MINISTER

Brandon Michaels

MUSIC MINISTER

David Richards

SERVICE LEADER

Brandon Michaels

LECTOR

Tom Michaels

GREETERS

John and Shirley Kostelny

USHER

John Kostelny

ALTAR CARE AND SACRISTAN

Janice Hapgood



## **PRAYER LIST**

*Members of the Congregation:*

Anne Gavac, Helen Gaydusek, Elaine Haase, Sheryl Hallmann, Anita Horak, Luddy Kovalsky, Robert Melnyk, Dot Myers, George Pagurko, Steve Podzamsky, Mary Sasuta, Bob Skudrna, and Olga Zavodny

*Friends and Relatives of the Congregation:*

Nora Jill Adelman, Kelly Alvey, Wally Bisping, Mary Costello, Ramona Daugs, Eric Dennison, Denise Fricano, Bill Holmes, Marjorie Hudnall, Nicole Kisiel, Rev. James Kuemmerle, Daryle Lauritsen, Lenyce Lawrenson, Delores Linden, Darlene Loughlin, Michele Mason, Donald Neal, Pat Pileggi, Dolores Pollitz, Alice Puglise, John Racek, Dr. Craig Reckard, Dale Renville, Sandy Rossella, Joe Ruiz, Rev. Dave Stefanson, Jim Sward, Harvey Swenson, Jacob Swenson, Gertrude Tarbox, Janie Tarbox, Ralph Thompson, Mark Van Scharrel and Taz Zajac

## ASHES IN PUBLIC?

In today's gospel Jesus cautions us against public acts of piety—on the one day of the year we leave worship with a visible smudge on our foreheads, reminding everyone we see that we have been to church. What are you supposed to do, wipe the ashes off before stepping outside? Do you leave them on only to have the cashier at the grocery store say, “You’ve got something on your forehead”?

Of course Jesus does not tell us to refrain from all acts of public piety. What Jesus seems concerned with is the why, not the what. Why do you pray in public? Why do you give alms? Why do you fast? If appearing faithful is a way to build yourself up before others, then it is not faithfulness but hypocrisy. On the other hand, if praying over a meal in a restaurant is something you do because praying at meals is part of your faith, by all means bow your head and pray.

As the season of Lent begins each year, God's people are invited to take on three great disciplines: prayer, fasting, and alms-giving. You hear the invitation to prayer, fasting, and alms-giving in the reading from Joel. Jesus' words in the gospel remind us that our acts of faithfulness always come as a response to God's gifts. Remembering this gives a note of humility to all we do. Piety is not something to brag about. Piety is not something to be proud of. Piety is but acknowledgment of the One who first gave us everything.

Finally, Paul makes it clear, as if there were ever any question: we only become righteous in Jesus. We know grace only because Jesus becomes our sin. This is the grounding for everything we do throughout the holy days of Lent.

