

February 17, 2021

Ash Wednesday

Joel 2:12-18

Ps 51:3-4, 5-6, 12-13, 14 & 17

2 Cor 5:20—6:2

Mt 6:1-6, 16-18

MORE THAN CHANGING OUR ROUTINES!

A man was looking forward to the Lenten season. He started planning what to do for forty (40) days, beginning Ash Wednesday. He said to himself, **“Starting Ash Wednesday I will stop drinking alcohol and I will also stop cursing.”** He was successful doing what he planned/promised. The day after Easter, the man went back to drinking and cursing.

What is the story telling us? The story is simply telling us that the man just had a change of routine for forty (40) days and not really a change of heart. If his focus was really changing his heart for the better, then going back to his old routine was never an option. Indeed, changing routine is easier than changing one’s heart.

We are gathered here today to open the Lenten season. This season is not a break from our daily routine. It is more than changing our routines. If we are thinking that this season is just a change of routine, real transformation will not happen to us. Conversion from within will be remote. Thus, after forty (40) days, like the man in the story, we will always go back to our ‘old sinful ways’.

What is the challenge of the Season of Lent for us? This season challenges us to have a paradigm shift, from just looking at it as a routine change to working on purifying our hearts. This is what the Lord God, thru the Prophet Joel, is calling us to do. The Lord God says: **“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.”** Clearly, this season is about working on our hearts - making sure that it is love-centered and not self-centered.

Aside from cleaning our hearts from things contrary to God, this season also dares us to work for the sake of the Gospel. St. Paul reminds us about this when he told us that ‘we are ambassadors for Christ.’ The word ‘ambassador’ means **“a person who acts as a representative or promoter of a specified activity.”** Therefore, starting today, we are to make sure that our words and actions will promote Christ Jesus and not ourselves. We will just be signs pointing others to Christ Jesus.

In our gospel proclaimed we heard again **the importance and the right way of doing almsgiving, prayer, and fasting.** These disciplines are not exclusively for Lenten season. These disciplines can be practiced even after the Season of Lent. The essential thing we have to

remember though when we apply these disciplines in our life is that **the focus is the alignment of our hearts to the heart of the Source and Giver of Life, Christ Jesus.** If we do the disciplines just to break our daily routine for forty (40) days, then we will be merely wasting our time. We will defeat the purpose of making sacrifices if our hearts will not be purified and challenged to be more and more like Christ Jesus.

What are your plans for this Lenten Season? Do you have plans with your family to intensify the disciplines of almsgiving, prayer, and fasting? In what ways you can be an 'ambassador for Christ' starting today? How can you promote Jesus and not yourself? How is your heart? Is your heart becoming more and more like the heart of Jesus? If not, are there attitudes or behaviors that need to be removed or purified from your heart?

The Season of Lent is more than changing our routines for forty (40) days. The Season of Lent is a time for us to introspect and see where we are at in our relationship with God. The Season of Lent desires our spiritual growth. The Season of Lent targets our hearts so we can speak and act like Christ Jesus as we continue our faith-life journey here on earth.

As we begin our Lenten journey, let us pray for one another to take this season seriously and commence on changing our hearts rather than just changing our routines.

God bless us all!