

ASH WEDNESDAY



Returning to God

Gracious God,
we have strayed from you,
yet you call us to return with our
whole heart.
We give thanks for your mercy
and yearn for the joy of your salvation.
Grant that our hearts might
be cleansed
and our spirits renewed!
Strengthen us
to give generously and authentically,
to pray humbly,
and to fast with our hearts set only
on you.
Sustain us as we embark on this
journey back to you.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Wednesday, March 5, 2025

Rend Your Hearts



Today's readings: Joel 2:12–18; Psalm 51:3–6, 12–17; 2 Corinthians 5:20–6:2; Matthew 6:1–6, 16–18.

In today's first reading, the Lord calls us to return to God with our "whole heart." During Lent, our prayer, fasting, and works of love/mercy prepare us for the new life in Christ that Easter celebrates. The Lenten season is an opportunity to practice self-discipline to refocus on God. Our prayer, fasting, and charity as we seek ongoing conversion allows us to more intentionally follow Jesus.

The disciplines of Lent can be practiced in a number of ways. Some people give up sweets or caffeine during Lent, others pray more frequently or serve at a soup kitchen. While contemplating a practice that you will work to keep in preparation for Easter, consider asking yourself: What will encourage me to regularly turn to God? How can I give to others, particularly those who may be impoverished in some way? How can I make my sacrifice or dedication a rending of my current ways to return to the Lord? Make a Lenten commitment that challenges us to open our hearts so that we can share our praises to God.

Jesus reminds us that it is important to authentically pray, fast, and give or serve those in need. Our Lenten practices are to redirect us to God, not to receive praise from others. As we begin this season, ask God to open your heart and renew a steadfast spirit within you. Turn to God for strength as you prepare to celebrate the resurrection of our Lord at Easter.



This Week at Home

Ash Wednesday, March 5

Be reconciled to God

St. Paul reminds us that “now is a very acceptable time... now is the day of salvation.” Choose daily to return to God through prayer, acts of love/mercy, and fasting. Even if you stumble in keeping your fast or promise this Lent, recommit to returning to God by saying a prayer every evening. Turn to God, who is “gracious and merciful... slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.” *Today’s readings:* Joel 2:12–18; Psalm 51:3–6, 12–17; 2 Corinthians 5:20–6:2; Matthew 6:1–6, 16–18.

Thursday, March 6

Choose life

Today we are reminded of the choice that is always before us: death or life.. Just like the Israelites, we must make the daily choice to fast from the things that keep us from the Lord. When evening comes today, reflect on your day. When did you choose to love the Lord, heed God’s voice, and hold fast to God? How can you choose life and follow Jesus tomorrow? *Today’s readings:* Deuteronomy 30:15–20; Psalm 1:1–6; Luke 9:22–25.

Friday, March 7

The fasting that I wish

The prophet Isaiah calls us to a particular kind of fast today. Isaiah reminds us that our return to the Lord requires acts of service. Spend time praying with today’s first reading. After praying with the excerpt from Isaiah, sit in silence and ask God how you might serve the oppressed, the hungry, the foreigner, the homeless, and the naked. Make a commitment to respond to this call sometime this week. *Today’s readings:* Isaiah 58:1–9; Psalm 51:3–6, 18–19; Matthew 9:14–15.

Saturday, March 8

Teach me

Set aside time to pray with today’s psalm. Familiarize yourself with the excerpt by reading it slowly. Then read it again, paying close attention to a word or phrase that stands out to you. Sit with that word or phrase for a few moments. Read the psalm once more and pause to listen to what God may be saying. Spend a moment in silence, allowing the psalm to sit in your heart. End your prayer with a word of gratitude. *Today’s readings:* Isaiah 58:9–14; Psalm 86:1–6; Luke 5:27–32.