

ASH WEDNESDAY



Even Now

O God,
you show yourself throughout the ages
as gracious, merciful, slow to anger,
abounding in steadfast love.
You give us not what we deserve but turn
your face toward us
and rain down your blessings upon us.
Even now you call us to return to you.

Help us to answer you.
Give us the strength that we need
to look at a broken world and respond,
that in loving one another we can love
as you love,
boundlessly and with compassion.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Wednesday, February 17, 2021 Called Together for a Broken World



Today's readings: Joel 2:12–18; Psalm 51:3–4, 5–6ab, 12–13, 14 and 17; 2 Corinthians 5:20—6:2; Matthew 6:1–6, 16–18. As the Church begins a period marked by prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, we hear Jesus teach us how we are to fast. Jesus tells us that our observance should be hidden, and that it will be seen by our Father, who sees what is hidden. And yet we wear our penitence marked upon our foreheads for all to see.

Jesus mentions that the “hypocrites” look gloomy and neglect their appearance because they seek social affirmation of their holiness. It is easy to judge these people of long ago and even easier to judge people we know. Is what they do so foreign to us? All of us desire to belong, to be embraced, to be part of a community.

The prophet Joel calls us to the kind of community we seek; rather than running after superficial approval, he calls all to a communal work, the great fast. When we look at the world around us, just like Joel, we see that everything is not as it should be. We recognize that the world is in dire need of God’s mercy, love, and forgiveness. Joel calls us to rend our hearts. Let us blow the horn and gather the people to ask for God’s mercy and forgiveness on behalf of a broken world. Marked with the sign of ashes, together we go into the world to be a sign of its impending redemption.

How is God calling you to respond to the world’s brokenness this Lent?



THIS WEEK AT HOME

Monday, February 15

Prayer

We know that relationships cannot thrive without the gifts of time and attention. When we pray, we give this same time and attention to our most important relationship. Prayer is talking, but also listening. Determine a space in your day to carve out additional time and attention for prayer this Lent. *Today's readings: Genesis 4:1–15, 25; Psalm 50:1 and 8, 16bc–17, 20–21; Mark 8:11–13.*

Tuesday, February 16

Almsgiving

What does the world need? It can be a pretty overwhelming list. We know that we live in a world where many things are not as they should be. When you look at the world around you, what breaks your heart? What makes you outraged? These feelings can be a way that God calls you to live out the call you received at your baptism. Pay attention to what you feel passionately about, and then respond by being God's love in the world. *Today's readings: Genesis 6:5–8; 7:1–5, 10; Psalm 29:1a and 2, 3ac–4, 3b and 9c–10; Mark 8:14–21.*

Wednesday, February 17

Fasting

When discussing the found sheep with a group of children, the topic of the ninety-nine left in the wilderness came up. One child said, "They have to fast from the Shepherd's presence in order for the flock to be whole again." Another child chimed in, "But they don't mind! They are glad to do it! That's how much they want everyone to be together." When the Church fasts together, we do so because we live in an in-between time: Jesus has ascended to the Father, he has not yet come again. We fast in anticipation of Jesus' arrival, when there will be no more sorrow, tears, and pain. We fast willingly because we want our broken world to be whole. *Today's readings: Joel 2:12–18; Psalm 51:3–4, 5–6ab, 12–13, 14 and 17; 2 Corinthians 5:20–6:2; Matthew 6:1–6, 16–18.*

Thursday, February 18

In Surrender, Freedom

When we surrender our will to the will of God, we find freedom. It is a paradox that denying ourselves makes us free. Yet very often, we want what is not good for us. In our striving, we can gain the whole world and lose ourselves. Copy these words: take up your cross and follow me. As you look at the statement, ask yourself what crosses you face. How would your life change if you embraced your crosses rather than avoided them? *Today's readings: Deuteronomy 30:15–20; Psalm 1:1–2, 3, 4 and 6; Luke 9:22–25.*

Friday, February 19

Act with Justice

The words of Isaiah direct our fast to the service of justice. We hear that the fast pleasing to the Lord is one that sets the oppressed free, feeds the hungry, brings homeless people into our homes, and clothes the naked. Think about one issue of justice that particularly touches your heart and get involved. You could serve at a soup kitchen, work at a homeless shelter, or host a baby shower for a local pregnant woman in need. This fast prepares us for the heavenly feast, where God shall wipe every tear from our eyes and his kingdom will have no end. *Today's readings: Isaiah 58:1–9a; Psalm 51:3–4, 5–6ab, 18–19; Matthew 9:14–15.*

Saturday, February 20

Follow Me

When Jesus told Levi "Follow me," Levi's response was clear: "leaving everything behind, he got up and followed him." Levi was probably no stranger to the judgments of the holy people of his day since tax collectors were reviled for collaborating with the Romans. Judgment never called Levi to a new way of living. What did? An encounter with a person who offered relationship and love. What joy Levi must have felt to offer a banquet at his home for Jesus, to be forgiven. Spend time in prayer thinking about what you must leave behind in order to respond to the call to follow Jesus. *Isaiah 58:9b–14; Psalm 86:1–2, 3–4, 5–6; Luke 5:27–32.*

