

- At times we might hear people ask: *“What is the purpose of Lent? Why do you Catholics go around with those ashes on your face?”*
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- Well...tell them:
- We have these ashes today to remind us that we are but dust and ashes...destined to return to the earth from which we came...that our souls go before God for judgment of our lives—whether we have lived well, according to His Word...or not.
- These ashes remind us that our lives on earth last but a moment...and yet eternity awaits. A life focused upon earthly things is thus a wasted life; a life focused upon the good...upon God...is the life to which we are called.
- These ashes remind us that we have sinned against our God, and remind us of those before us who repented, sitting in dust and ashes. Their example spurs us on to reject what God rejects, and to seek what God approves.
- These ashes are a sign of mourning...mourning over the Holy One... the Savior...as we remember His death upon the cross so that we might be saved and enter into Heaven. That is how much He loves us.
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- Yes, these ashes remind us that our earthly lives are so very temporary...
- ...but our souls—those wonderful animating spirits within us by which we are made in God’s image...are supernatural—greater than the merely natural... formed by the supernatural being: God, our Father and Creator...and to this wonderful and magnificent Father we owe our love...our dedication...our very being.
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- These ashes, and the Lenten season and its devotions, help us recall these realities...to seek God’s forgiveness for our transgressions, and to re-orient us to reject evil and to seek the good.
- As we heard in our first reading from 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.*

- Our fasting, these ashes, are not goals, but simply tools to focus us on what God really wants of us, which we hear from the prophet Isaiah:
- *“This...is the fasting that I wish: releasing those bound unjustly... Setting free the oppressed... Sharing your bread with the hungry, sheltering the oppressed and the homeless; Clothing the naked...and not turning your back on your own. If you remove from your midst oppression, false accusation and malicious speech... If you bestow your bread on the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted...Then your light shall break forth like the dawn...you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help, and He will say: ‘Here I am!’”*
- In other words: love God with all your being first of all, and love your neighbor as yourself. All else is utterly worthless if it does not assist us toward these goals.
- Psalm 4 rebukes us: *“Oh men, how long will your hearts be closed, will you love what is futile and seek what is false?”*
- So this Lent, let us be honest in our self-examination... focused on cleansing out the bad, and seeking the good...in works of penance of prayer, fasting and almsgiving...remembering the book of Tobit: *“... almsgiving delivers from death, and it will purge away every sin. Those who perform deeds of charity and of righteousness will have fullness of life; but those who commit sin are the enemies of their own lives.”* (Tobit 12:9-10 RSV)
- And so, these ashes remind us: *“Before man are life and death; he is given whichever he chooses.”* (Sirach 15:17)
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- So, let us go forth today with Christ’s sign upon our foreheads... remembering the salvation He won for us upon the cross...and boldly proclaim with Joshua by the sign of the cross of ashes emblazoned upon us: *“...if you be unwilling to serve the LORD, choose this day*

whom you will serve...but as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD!" (Jos 24:15)

Reading 1

[Jl 2:12-18](#)

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.

Responsorial Psalm

[Ps 51:3-4, 5-6ab, 12-13, 14 and 17](#)

R. (see 3a) **Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.**
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. Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.

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. Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.

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. Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.

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. Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.

Reading II

[2 Cor 5:20-6:2](#)

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.

Gospel

[Mt 6:1-6, 16-18](#)

Jesus said to his disciples:

Ash Wednesday
2015

"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."