ASH WEDNESDAY

Spirit of Humility

God of mercy,
again and again you have called us
to repent from our sins and accept
your mercy.
Today you gather your sons and
daughters
in a community of prayer.
We come mindful of our sins of when we
have been too proud to do your will,
and return to you with a desire to learn
your ways.

As we enter Lent,
provide us with a spirit of humility
that we may grow in dependence on you,
trusting in your steadfast love.
May these forty days of prayer, fasting,
and almsgiving
bring us to turn our lives to you,
realizing that you are all that we need.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus
Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Wednesday, February 18, 2015
A Baptismal Nature

Today's Readings: Joel 2:12–18; Psalm 51:3–4, 5–6ab, 12–13, 14 and 17 (3a); 2 Corinthians 5:20—6:2; Matthew 6:1–6, 16–18. We typically think of ashes, fasting, and repentance as characterizing Lent. At Mass today, we receive ashes, and many of us have decided to fast from a habit or a food during these weeks. But Lent is not only a penitential season, it has a baptismal nature. We are journeying through this season with the catechumens as they prepare for Baptism.

Perhaps during these weeks we might want to focus on the Sign of the Cross as we consider the baptismal nature of the season. After all, the ashes are not just placed on our forehead today, but formed into the Sign of the Cross. When we enter the church each week, we remember our Baptism as we dip our hand into blessed water and make the Sign of the Cross on ourselves. At the beginning of Mass, we make the Sign of the Cross, acknowledging that the liturgy is prayed in the name of the Trinity. The Sign of the Cross is such a part of our practice as Catholics that we often make it without consciously thinking about it. We might make it a practice during Lent to carefully pray the words of the Sign of the Cross and reflect on what it means to say this prayer.

As we make the Sign of the Cross, then, we might consider the life that we were brought into through the Cross. The Cross is both a sign of the sacrifice that Jesus made to secure our salvation and of the glory of God. Through the Cross and Resurrection, we were brought into eternal life. And so this Lent, perhaps each time you make the Sign of the Cross, you might do so carefully, contemplating the great mystery we observe in a small prayer.

THIS WEEK AT HOME

Monday, February 16, 2015
Life in Community

In today's First Reading, Cain responds to the Lord's question about Abel with the query, "am I my brother's keeper?" As Christians, the concern we have for others should reflect our status as our brother and sister's keeper. As Pope Francis states in *The Joy of the Gospel*, "at the very heart of the Gospel is life in community and engagement with others" (177). As we prepare to enter into the season of Lent, let us consider how we care for our brothers and sisters in need. Today's Readings: Genesis 4:1–15, 25; Psalm 50:1 and 8, 16bc–17, 20–21 (14a); Mark 8:11–13.

Tuesday, February 17, 2015
A Time of Reconciliation

The day before Lent, known as Mardi Gras, or Fat Tuesday, is customarily festive. Celebrants eat their favorite foods and sometimes take part in parades and wear colorful beads. If you have not already decided on the spiritual practices you will make a part of your life this Lent, you may want to schedule time to do so. Keep in mind that Lent is a time of reconciliation. Are there steps toward reconciliation with someone that you would like to take? Today's Readings: Genesis 6:5–8; 7:1–5, 10; Psalm 29:1a and 2, 3ac–4, 3b and 9c–10 (11b); Mark 8:14–21.

Wednesday, February 18, 2015
Ash Wednesday

This year, in addition to putting coins in the Catholic Relief Services' rice bowl container that your parish distributes, you may want to visit www.crs.org. There, you can learn about the health and economic challenges faced by the people that your donations will help. You may find that diseases foreign to people in the United States are common in some areas of the world. Reading articles on the website can be the start of connecting with people in need. Today's Readings: Joel 2:12–18; Psalm 51:3–4, 5–6ab, 12–13, 14 and 17 (3a); 2 Corinthians 5:20—6:2; Matthew 6:1–6, 16–18.

Thursday, February 19, 2015
Take Up Your Cross

Today's Gospel provides Christ's directive to his followers to "take up their cross." Have you ever considered, as a Lenten discipline, taking up your cross without complaint? It is possible that taking up your cross joyfully might be a more important spiritual exercise than fasting from chocolate. Undoubtedly, learning to live with your cross will have long-lasting effects not only for you but for the people around you. Certainly, it will model discipleship. Today's Readings: Deuteronomy 30:15–20; Psalm 1:1–2, 3, 4 and 6 (40:5a); Luke 9:22–25.

Friday, February 20, 2015
God Is Our Strength

In the reading from Joel on Ash Wednesday, we heard the Lord call on his people to return to him with fasting, and in today's reading from Isaiah, the Lord speaks of a fast that lets the oppressed go free. Our fasting is not a mere giving up of food. In the first months of Pope Francis' pontificate, he called on us to pray and fast for peace in Syria. When we fast, we find that God is our strength. Can you see a reason to continue fasting after Lent ends? Today's Readings: Isaiah 58:1–9a; Psalm 51:3–4, 5–6ab, 18–19 (19b); Matthew 9:14–15.

Saturday, February 21, 2015
St. Peter Damian, Bishop and Doctor of the Church

Peter Damian (1007–1072) was a gifted teacher, canon lawyer, and reformer. This Benedictine monk lived in a time in which two antipopes tried to take the papacy and in which there were many abuses, including that of clerical child sexual abuse. His voice aided Pope Alexander II during the schism and was heard against those who abused the young. We need to have such courage of convictions, no matter the status of the person involved in wrongdoing. Today's Readings: Isaiah 58:9b–14; Psalm 86:1–2, 3–4, 5–6 (11ab); Luke 5:27–32.

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