

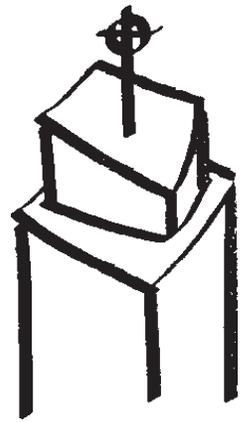
OUR FAMILY



NEWS

For Oblates of St. Bede Abbey, Peru, Illinois

January &
February, 2015



LENT

ASH WEDNESDAY: SETTING THE TONE FOR LENT

The biblical readings in every Mass tell us what the word of God has to say about the particular mystery that is celebrated in each day's liturgy. Those for Ash Wednesday are particularly eloquent in setting the tone for the season of Lent, especially the first part of the season. We shall hear once more the fervent exhortation of the prophet Joel to *return to the Lord, your God...with fasting, and weeping, and mourning*. We shall hear St. Paul's invitation, in his Second Letter to the Corinthians, to *be reconciled to God and not to neglect the grace of God in vain*. We shall hear, in St. Matthew's Gospel, the counsel of Jesus himself about how to *give alms*, how to *pray*, how to *fast*, about the spirit of willingness and hence the secrecy in which these good works are to be done.



Something to which we do not always pay equal attention is the texts of the liturgical rites themselves and what *they* have to say to us about the mystery that we are celebrating. There are two texts in the Mass of Ash Wednesday that I would like to point out as especially relevant to the spirit of Lent.

The first is the introit, or entrance song: *You are merciful to all, O Lord, and despise nothing that you have made. You overlook people's sins, to bring them to repentance, and you spare them, for you are the Lord our God*. With this passage from the Book of Wisdom we shall begin our Ash Wednesday celebration by reminding ourselves what kind of God it is that we believe in and seek to serve.

In the Bible, God's fundamental attitude toward us is always that of benevolence. It is true that he is often represented, especially by the prophets, as outraged by human rebellion and sinfulness, therefore as angry and intent upon punishment. But his anger, sometimes colorfully described, is a literary way of speaking of his firm opposition to that human disobedience and sinfulness. This passage from Wisdom makes it clear that his basic stance is one of *mercy*.

He does not *hate* anything that he has created. Since God did not have need of anything himself, his motive for creating things can only have been to benefit the creatures themselves. He loves us and wants us to be happy with him. But our sins have frustrated his purpose. His entire plan of salvation is meant to counteract this, so he wants us to repent, and is willing to *overlook* our sins in order to restore his original intention for our salvation.

The other text that I would point out is the preface that in bygone days was the sole preface prescribed for Ash Wednesday, Preface IV of Lent, for which, now, Preface III of Lent may be substituted, but which perhaps remains the one most often used, precisely because of its succinct but complete summary of the goals of the Lenten season. It says this: *Through bodily fasting you restrain our faults, raise up our minds, and bestow both virtue and its rewards.* This text lists four objectives of our Lenten observance, four ways in which we may expect to profit if we take Lent seriously, engaging in the fasting—and in the almsgiving and the prayer that the Church has always understood as the necessary complements of fasting: first, the restraint, that is, the correction, of our faults; second, the raising up of our minds to God; third, our growth in virtue, that is, holiness; and, fourth, the rewards of virtue, especially that of everlasting life.

First, the restraint, that is, the correction of our faults. Lent is an appropriate time for repentance. St. Paul, in the second reading for Ash Wednesday referred to above, quotes the prophet Isaiah in telling us that *now is an acceptable time, now is the day of salvation.* We should, to be sure, always have an attitude of repentance, of regret about our failings and sinfulness, a clear acknowledgment of what there remains in us that is unconverted. But we easily postpone such a reckoning and the changes in our life that it would require us to make. Let us make use of the season of Lent to confess our sins and sincerely try to deal with those areas of our life that are still closed to grace.

Second, the raising up of our minds to God. We are all fixated to some extent upon material things, on the routines and challenges and problems of our everyday life. We know that there is a more important dimension of our existence, but we tend to keep it in the background. Let us use the season of Lent as a time of turning our minds to what is truly important and, in the end, decisive; indeed, as a time of lifting them to God.

Third, our growth in virtue, that is, holiness. Lent is not basically about doing things that are difficult and giving up things that are pleasant. It is about renouncing sin and deepening our relationship with God. Its real benefit is not in what we do, but in what we may become by the doing. Penances are only a means to an end, and the end is to become closer to Christ and more like him. Let us make the Lenten season, not a time for testing our endurance, but a time for uniting ourselves more completely to our Lord.

Fourth, the rewards of virtue, especially everlasting life. The ultimate goal of our Lenten observance lies beyond this present life. We shall never be completely at rest, never feel full satisfaction, never escape from the grasp of imperfection, until we rest in God. Just as Lent leads to the joy of Easter, its effects in our lives will have their consummation only in the life of glory. Let us use the days of Lent to more and more enliven within our hearts a fervent desire for the life to come!

+ Fr. Claude Peifer, O.S.B.

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Our Family News is published in the special interest of the oblates of St. Bede Abbey. Please send changes of address and comments to The Editor, Our Family News, St. Bede Abbey, 24 W US Highway 6, Peru, IL 61354.

We welcome your submissions to this publication, either instructive or reflective, whether prose or poetry. They should in some way relate to the **Rule of Benedict**, Benedictine spirituality, and/or the oblate program. The editor reserves the rights to choose material for publication and to edit as necessary.

SCHEDULE OF UPCOMING MEETINGS

Meetings are held in the abbey church from 1:30
P.M. to 4:30 P.M.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2015

Sunday, March 8, 2015
Sunday, April 12, 2015
Sunday, May 3, 2015



Passage for *Lectio* at the January Meeting

Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise;
his greatness no one can fathom.
One generation will commend your works to another;
they will tell of your mighty acts.

Psalm 145:3-4

Passage for *Lectio* at the February Meeting

When I kept silent,
my bones wasted away
through my groaning all day long.

Then I acknowledged my sin to you
and did not cover up my iniquity.

I said, "I will confess
my transgressions to the Lord"—
and you forgave
the guilt of my sin.

Many are the woes of the wicked,
but the Lord's unfailing love
surrounds the one who trusts in him.

Psalm 32:3.5.10

Abbey Prayer Schedule

Visitors are welcome to join the monks for Mass and for the hours of the Divine Office. Conventual Mass is celebrated on the first level of the abbey church, the hours of the Divine Office on the second level. During the school year, the monks' schedule is as follows.

6:00 A.M. Morning Prayer*
12:00 Noon Midday Prayer
5:00 P.M. Conventual Mass**
7:10 P.M. Evening Prayer***

* on Sunday, 7:00 A.M.

** on Sunday, 10:00 A.M. and on Monday, 7:30 A.M.

*** on Sunday, 5:00 P.M.

