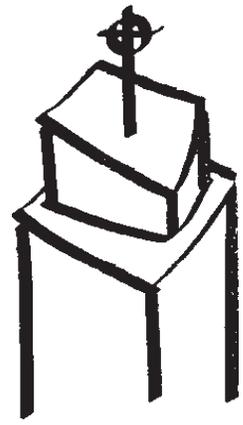


OUR FAMILY NEWS



For Oblates of St. Bede Abbey, Peru, Illinois

January &
February, 2020



ASH WEDNESDAY

The readings of today's Mass are meant to set the tone not only for today's liturgy but for that of the entire season of Lent. The Old Testament reading from the prophet Joel is a fervent and elegant invitation from God to "return to me." It tells us **what** we should be doing in this season. The gospel, from Matthew, tells us **how** we should do it. Not only are the practices of almsgiving, prayer, and fasting detailed there, but also the kind of motivation that must accompany them in order to insure our sincerity. The remaining reading, from St. Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians, offers us still another dimension of what we need to consider about this season and how we shall observe it: it is concerned with the **end** or **purpose** of Lent and so with the more fundamental problem or condition that we experience and that requires Lent in the first place.

This passage spells out for us how God's saving love touches our lives: it is a process by which grace is mediated to us through human agents. That is part of what we may call the law of incarnation: God does not ordinarily deal with us through visions and locutions, through thunderbolts and flashes of lightning; he does not speak to us directly or by sending heavenly messengers, or by working miracles to attract our attention. He usually deals with us through human agents and ordinary human situations, and requires that we have faith enough to see his hand at work in these often prosaic circumstances.

What St. Paul is concerned with in this passage is the process that he calls "**reconciliation**." Our basic problem is that we have become alienated from God by **sin**. We therefore must become reconciled with him, and we can do this only by receiving his forgiveness. The Old Testament, by and large, thought that in order to receive God's forgiveness, people had to observe the Law that he had set out for them. At his conversion Paul became acutely aware of the pervading sinfulness of all human beings and of the role of Christ in repairing this breach. It is God who reconciles, and he has accomplished reconciliation not by means of the Law but through Christ. This has been done once for all, and so we have already been redeemed, but the reconciliation has to be applied individually to each one of us. Hence what he calls the "ministry" of reconciliation needs to continue to be performed in the Church, and so this function has been handed down to mediators, who are empowered to offer God's forgiveness to each individual who repents and desires salvation.

These ministers are “ambassadors” for Christ. They prolong his mission; they communicate **his** appeal to sinners, not their own. Christ therefore **appeals** to us through them, respecting our freedom but fervently hoping that we shall accept. *God has reconciled us to himself through Christ, he says, and given us the message of reconciliation. God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ.* Now this invitation, this **appeal** (for it is more than an invitation), comes to us through the apostles and their successors. *So we are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us. We implore you, Paul says, on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.* This is the business of Lent, becoming fully reconciled to God through Christ, and we can only echo St. Paul on this first day of Lent by imploring you to take the opportunity seriously and to use this time to become fully reconciled to God. Whatever there may be in your life that still stands in need of reconciliation with God, use this season, we implore you, to let it be healed.

St. Paul goes on to explain Christ’s role in this process: although he was without sin himself, he was made by God *to be sin*. That means that Jesus voluntarily allowed himself “to stand in that relationship to God that is normally the result of personal sin,” fully accepting the status of sinful humanity, identifying with our wretchedness and need. He did this so that we might become the righteousness of God in him, that is, “so that we might stand in that relationship to God that we call righteousness or justification,” a state in which we have been acquitted of sin and reconciled with God. We have been enabled to enter into this state not by our own merit but by the surpassing gift of his favor.

That is why the Church can proclaim to us that this very day, and indeed every day of this time of Lent, is potentially a day of salvation for us. It does this in the conclusion to the reading from St. Paul, in which the latter cites a passage from the forty-ninth chapter of the prophet Isaiah: *In an acceptable time I heard you, and on the day of salvation I helped you.* And St. Paul concludes from that, *Behold, now is a very acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.* This is the Church’s invitation to us on this day. This is the blessed gift that God implores us to accept during this season of grace: full reconciliation with God. Let us all open our hearts to receive it.

+ 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, January 12, 2020

Sunday, February 9, 2020

Sunday, March 8, 2020

Sunday, April 5, 2020

Sunday, May 3, 2020

Passage for *Lectio* at the January Meeting

If love is the answer,
community is the context,
and tenderness the methodology.

Gregory Boyle

Passage for *Lectio* at the February Meeting

We don't think ourselves into a new way of living.
We live ourselves into a new way of thinking.

Richard Rohr

