

Our Faith

Lenten Observances

This week we will enter the solemn season of Lent, that period of forty days when Mother Church vests herself simply in violet, when her sacred halls are bare, and much of her music is muted. Flowers are set aside, our Glorias have ceased, and our Alleluias disappear. And at the end of the season, candles and lamps which have burnt in her sanctuaries all year round will be extinguished, bells will fall silent, and altars will be stripped. Lent is a solemn season characterized by austerity in our liturgy. But Lent does not end with the liturgy. Instead, the liturgy – the work of the church – is rightly the source and expression the sacrifice we make in our lives. And so in this season, it is not just the Church, but our lives too which should be characterized by that austerity. Traditionally, the Church calls to us to do four things in Lent: to fast more, to give more alms, to do more good deeds, and to pray more. Note the word 'more': these are practices that should characterize the Christian anyway. But in Lent, we are called to do them 'more'. Why? Well St Thomas Aquinas reminds us that it is through the pragmatic and practical stuff we do that our souls are nurtured, because what we do affects who we are. So, for instance, practicing hospitality will, over time, make a person a more generous person. And in terms of those traditional disciplines: practicing almsgiving or doing good deeds will make a person more charitable; practicing fasting will make a person more grateful; practicing prayer will make a person more like Jesus. All we have to do, is commit to doing it. So may we this Lent adopt a little bit more austerity in our lives, that in these forty days and forty nights, we might be transformed into his likeness.

Elements of the Mass

Ash

Ash is used in Church on Ash Wednesday. It is made from the burning of the palm crosses from the previous year's Palm Sunday celebrations. These crosses are collected in church and then burnt, which reminds us that all earthly things come to an end and our prime hope is in the love of God and in the promise of the Resurrection life. The ash is a reminder of our own mortality. It is used to make the sign of the cross on the forehead of a person (or sometimes is sprinkled on the crown of a person's head). As the cross is made the priest says 'Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return' and also 'Repent and believe the Gospel'. This reminds us of our mortality, that we will each one of die but that we have hope through the Gospel. We are marked with the sign of the Cross at our Baptism and each Ash Wednesday as a sign of our mortality but also as a sign that we are saved by Christ and through belief in him and the message of the Gospel we can be saved and have eternal life. Thus in something as simple as ash the church offers us a profound message about our life and faith.

11th February
2018

Sunday Next
Before Lent
Sixth Sunday of
the Year

Called to Glory



St Paul writes to the Corinthians 'The God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness', has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.' There are two 'glorious' people in Scripture: Moses had to cover his face when he left the presence of God, and Jesus' clothes at the Transfiguration shone brighter than the sun. This radiant light of the divine presence is the same light that shines in our heart when we come to know the truth, life and love of God in Jesus. It is a given as an encouragement and a foretaste to provide comfort and encouragement on our journey to God. We are St Paul writes to the Ephesians 'children of light.' We are called to 'cast away the works of darkness and put on the armour of light'. This is the work of penitence and fasting that we anticipate in Lent. But, he also reminds us elsewhere that although we see only dimly now we will come to fullness of knowledge when we meet God face to face: this will be the fully realized encounter with glory revealed in the face of Christ.

Prayers to Remember

Protect us, Lord, from becoming entangled in the cares of this life, or absorbed by too much pleasure in it. Give us strength to resist all that distracts us from living daily towards you, patience to endure all the challenges on our path and constancy to persevere to the end; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Adapted from Thomas à Kempis

