

COMMENTATOR

Welcome everyone to our Ash Wednesday observance. We are grateful that you are with us.

Today, we announce the beginning of a forty-day fast!

Today, we announce the beginning of forty-days of alms giving!

Today, we announce the beginning of a forty-day school of prayer!

Today, we announce the beginning of Lent.

(Pause)

Today, we begin our journey through the sacred days of Lent.

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Joel.

Even now, says the Most High,
return to me with your whole heart,
with fasting, and weeping, and mourning;
Rend your hearts, not your garments,
and return to the Most High, your God.
For gracious and merciful is your God,
slow to anger, rich in kindness,
and relenting in punishment.
Perhaps God will again relent and leave behind a blessing,
Offerings and libations for the Most High, 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 God, weep,
And say, "Spare, O God, 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 God was stirred to concern for the land
and took pity on the people.

"The Word of God." R/. "Thanks be to God!"

A Reading from the Second Letter of Paul to the Corinthians

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.

"The Word of God." R/. "Thanks be to God!"

A reading from the Good News according to Matthew.

Jesus said to his disciples:

"Take care not to perform righteous deeds
in order that people may see them;
otherwise, you will have no recompense
from your God in heaven.

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 God, 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 God in secret.

And your God 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 God who is hidden.

And your God who sees what is hidden, will repay you."

"The Gospel of Our Savior Jesus Christ." R/.
Praise to You, Lord, Jesus Christ!"

COMMENTATOR

Signed with the cross of ashes, let us now turn to God in heaven who sees what is hidden in the recesses of our heart.

For whom and for what would we like to pray this evening? You are invited to unmute your mike. We would very much like to pray with you. Our response is Healing God, hear our prayer.

When community prayer has slowed or stopped:

Merciful God, through the death and resurrection of Jesus, we have been saved from the bonds of sin and death. As we begin our Lenten journey, grant us the grace to walk as people of forgiveness and reconciliation. We ask this through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. **Amen**

Closing Prayer

Rend Your Heart

A Blessing for Ash Wednesday by Jan Richardson

To receive this blessing,
all you have to do
is let your heart break.
Let it crack open.
Let it fall apart
so that you can see
its secret chambers,
the hidden spaces
where you have hesitated to go.
Your entire life
is here, inscribed whole
upon your heart's walls:
every path taken
or left behind,
every face you turned toward
or turned away,
every word spoken in love
or in rage,
every line of your life
you would prefer to leave
in shadow,
every story that shimmers
with treasures known
and those you have yet
to find.
It could take you days
to wander these rooms.
Forty, at least.
And so let this be
a season for wandering,
for trusting the breaking,
for tracing the rupture
that will return you
to the One who waits,
who watches,
who works
within the rending
to make your heart whole. **Amen**