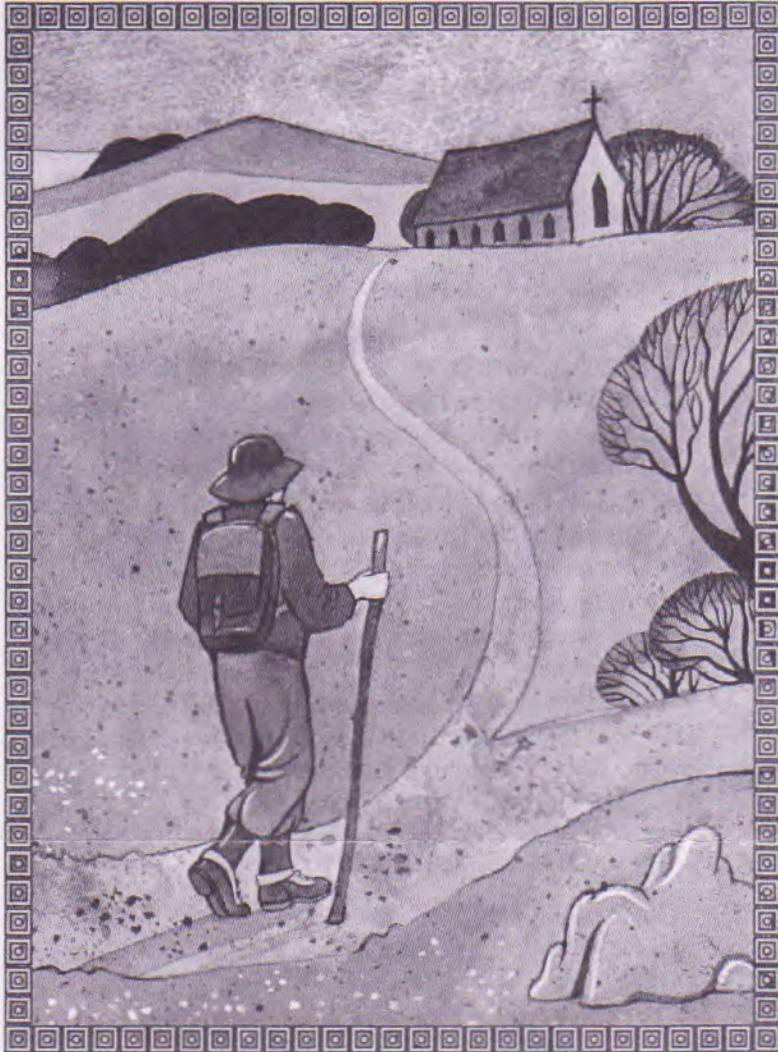


Ash Wednesday



Prayer for the Beginning of Lent

Jesus, beloved friend,
you call us to a season
of growth and repentance.
You have high hopes for us;
may we not disappoint you.
May we see your face ahead of us,
beaming at the end of our Lenten
journey.

Give us strength and energy
to run toward you during this season.
Give us integrity and generosity
in each new challenge.
We ask this of you who live and reign
with God the Father
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Wednesday, February 13, 2013
Turning toward Him

Today's Readings: Joel 2:12–18; Psalm 51:3–4, 5–6ab, 12–13, 14 and 17 (see 3a); 2 Corinthians 5:20—6:2; Matthew 6:1–6, 16–18. Often the Church year feels out of sync with the world. This is most obvious during Advent, with its quiet and reflective tone. The stores scream “Buy!” while the people of God pray with deep longing for Christ's coming. The Advent color, violet, contrasts with the shrieking red, green, and tinsel of the malls. By the time we enjoy Christmas festivities, the last trace of celebration has faded from commerce. Decorations come down December 26th, sales start, and the push is on towards the next holiday: Valentine's Day—just as Lent is beginning.

Today the images of society and Church stand in sharp contrast: throbbing red hearts and grey ashes. The media reported our good resolutions on New Years Day; the

Church points us toward conversion today. Probably that's good timing. The heartfelt resolve that was so strong on January 1st can fade six weeks later.

But careful reading of today's Gospel shows that we shouldn't flaunt our differences with the society surrounding us. The last thing Jesus wants is self-righteous sorts who condemn others because they're so impressed with themselves. He encourages us not to look grim because we're fasting. In fact, the advice to “put oil on your head and wash your face” sounds like maintaining a healthy, happy appearance!

This perspective accords with Joel. Lent isn't a wrenching, arduous ordeal, but a time to return to the source of mercy, kindness, and compassion. Our Creator and Savior who loves us awaits us eagerly: can we turn towards him?



This Week at Home

Monday, February 11

Our Lady of Lourdes

Many of us will need healing this Lent. So it's appropriate that today's memorial commemorates Our Lady's appearance in 1858 to a young French girl near a spring of water with healing properties. Today four to six million pilgrims travel there each year seeking cures. At the Lourdes sanctuary, many drink or bathe in the waters. What healing do you seek? Healing for a physical illness? addiction? an emotional wound? In today's Gospel, even those who touched only the fringe of Jesus's cloak were cured. Prayer can be like a pilgrimage to Lourdes or like reaching for Jesus's garment. Today's Readings: Genesis 1:1-19; Psalm 104:1-2a, 5-6, 10 and 12, 24 and 35c (31b); Mark 6:53-56.

Tuesday, February 12

Fat Tuesday

In the days before refrigeration, Christians consumed their meat and dairy products before Lent began—hence the popularity of pancakes, doughnuts, and other sweet, rich foods. Those living in the south have Mardi Gras, and others also indulge in merriment before the quiet season. Today's Readings: Genesis 1:20-2:4a; Psalm 8:4-5, 6-7, 8-9 (2ab); Mark 7:1-13.

Wednesday, February 13

Ash Wednesday

How fitting that today we all enter into a time of prayer, fasting, and repentance. The rest of the year we may live superficially, heedless of our many blessings. We may eat more than our bodies need. We may deny our failures as individuals, as a nation, and as Church. But today that changes: we focus on making amends. As Jesus stresses in the Gospel, we do so not to trumpet our holiness or to attract attention with fanfare. We enter this season quietly, prayerfully, filled with hope for transformation during the next six weeks. Today's Readings: Joel 2:12-18; Psalm 51:3-4, 5-6ab, 12-13, 14 and 17 (see 3a); 2 Corinthians 5:20-6:2; Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18.

Thursday, February 14

Sts. Cyril and Methodius

Today's saints were brothers who grew up in ninth century Greece. Both were educated, involved in church or political affairs, but living in a monastery when they were sent to evangelize the Slavs in Moravia, which was newly independent from Germany. Cyril invented an alphabet and together they translated the Gospel, epistles, and psalms into the Slavic language and created a Slavic liturgy. German clergy were outraged by this use of the vernacular, which led to years of struggle for the saints, including their refusal of ordination to Slavic priests, exile, and accusations of heresy. Now they are dear to Czechs and Slovaks. Valentine's Day focuses on romance; this memorial honors love of God and a people. Today's Readings: Deuteronomy 30:15-20; Psalm 1:1-2, 3, 4, and 6 (40:5a); Luke 9:22-25.

Friday, February 15

Preparing for New Growth

Pray for guidance, and then choose a constructive Lenten practice: more study or reading? more work for social justice? more exercise or time outdoors? more prayer and quiet? more time with family or friends? Create a prayer corner in your home for Lent with a purple cloth, candle, Bible, and perhaps a green plant, flowering branch, or crocuses—all suggestions of the new growth that will unfold. Today's Readings: Isaiah 58:1-9a; Psalm 51:3-4, 5-6ab, 18-19 (19b); Matthew 9:14-15.

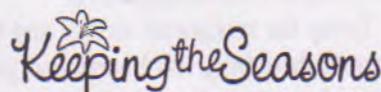
Saturday, February 16

God's Priorities

The promises in today's passage from Isaiah are heartening: God will give light in darkness, renew strength, provide plenty despite drought, rebuild ruins, and make bones strong. These are our rewards for heeding God's will instead of our own, and for removing oppression, avoiding malicious speech, feeding the hungry, caring for the afflicted, and honoring the Sabbath. Earlier in verse 6, God has said "Is not this the fast that I choose?" Today's Readings: Isaiah 58:9b-14; Psalm 86:1-2, 3-4, 5-6 (11ab); Luke 5:27-32.



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 Keeping the Seasons

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