

Ash Wednesday SML 2017
MT 6:1-6, 16-18

We begin the 40 day holy season of Lent today, with Ash Wednesday, with an ashen cross and the words, “Remember, man, that thou art dust, and unto dust, thou shall return.” Year after year, Ash Wednesday after Ash Wednesday, ashes are received with a reminder that all of us will die, providing some of us with ample opportunity to amend our lives, and rarely is a thought given to the seriousness of the moment.

Every time I drive in procession from our Church to the cemetery, it’s a show stopper. The procession is slow, and life is slow for the duration of the ride, and I am so very present to how precious life is.

“Remember, man, that thou art dust, and unto dust, thou shall return.”

Ash Wednesday begins the 40 day season Lent. Forty days, recalling:

- a. The 40 days and 40 nights Noah spent on the ark
- b. The 40 days and 40 nights Abraham spent in the desert on his way to Mt. Horeb (rabbinic tale)
- c. the 40 years the Israelites sojourned in the desert from Egypt to the Promised Land
- d. the 40 days and 40 nights Moses spent on Mount Sinai

e. the 40 days and 40 nights Our Blessed Lord spent in the desert, where he was tempted three times, and during which time he neither ate nor drank.

The self sacrifice of Our Blessed Lord during his 40 days and 40 nights in the desert is the reason why Lent is a penitential season, a time for self-denial, prayer and Christian charity to perform a penance, to expiate sin, to make up for our sins.

So many of us reduce Lent to, and revert back to the Lenten practices of our childhood. What are you giving up for Lent? I could ask a classroom of adults and a classroom of second graders what they are giving up for Lent, and I imagine the list of sacrifices would match almost to a tee. I wonder, in God's great design, how many sins are expiated by giving up chocolate for Lent?

At St. Mary of the Lakes, the St. Vincent DePaul Society is our very good venue to help those in need, who ministers to those who have financial hardships and need help with food, and rent and utility assistance. It goes without saying that the number of those coming to St. Vincent dePaul has increased tenfold given the current economy. And while contributions are holding their own regarding our ability to help, the need for volunteer help increases to complete their mission of helping

others. This is where you come in. When the Church defines the Season of Lent as a penitential season, a time for self-denial, prayer and Christian charity, do you really think Our Blessed Lord is asking people to give up chocolate, or to perform corporal and spiritual works of mercy?

Plenty of opportunity to actually help others: corporal and spiritual works of mercy, which is how we will be judged. So give some thought to contact SVDP to get the ball rolling. I spoke to Jim Dwyer, their president and they are ready to get back to you if they don't pick up.

“Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you a drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you? Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for the least of my brothers, you did for me.” Nowhere in the Gospel did Our Blessed Lord ask if you gave up chocolate for Lent. (MT 25:37-40)