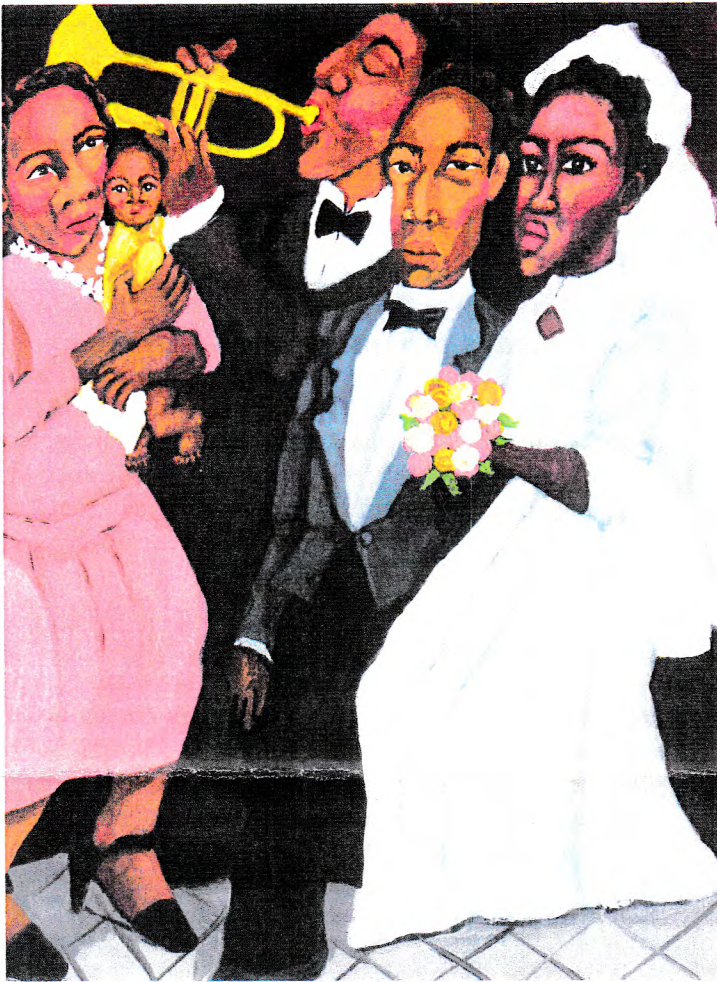


ASH WEDNESDAY



Unbounded Mercy

Gracious and merciful Father,
we are assembled before you,
returning to you with humble hearts
as we enter this sacred season of Lent.
Accept our repentant spirits,
and spare us with your unbounded mercy;
Bless our offerings, those of joy and those
of sorrow;

for we know your blessings in our lives
and approach you with open hearts.
May the spirit of the People of God
proclaim a community of joyful praise,
assembled wisdom, and prayerful
proclamation
as we gather in your name,
and commend ourselves to you.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Ash Wednesday, March 1, 2017

Do Not Look Gloomy

Today's Readings: Joel 2:12–18; Psalm 51:3–4, 5–6ab, 12–13, 14, 17; 2 Corinthians 5:20–6:2; Matthew 6:1–6, 16–18. Lent is a penitential season, but Jesus reminds us that none of our penitential practices call us to be gloomy. Rather, in our penitence, we are called to turn our lives around. If we practice giving alms, but seem to do so only to bring attention to ourselves, then our giving has little meaning. If we practice changing our lives, and do so with joy, then that practice will lead to more joy.

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells his disciples not to be like hypocrites, as he challenges their motivation. If we are true disciples of Jesus, then our baptismal call is our motivation. How are we Christ to others? In this solemn season of Lent, our motivation is not only to turn our lives around. We are

motivated also to return our lives to their baptismal character and approach the font renewed at Easter. Paul reminds us in the Second Reading not to receive the grace of God in vain. If we are disciples and ambassadors of Christ, then our Baptism has strengthened us to work on repairing our sinful ways. And what better time than now. Behold, now is a very acceptable time. Behold, now is the day of salvation.

As Lent begins, let us work on renewing our Baptism. This Ash Wednesday, let us proclaim with inner joy our lives grounded in Christ, united by the Spirit, and welcomed home by the Father. If we practice with eagerness, prayerfulness, and inner consistency, then our baptismal call and our baptismal nature will emerge, and Christ will be our face to the world.



THIS WEEK AT HOME

Monday, February 27

Prayer

The first of the three disciplines of Lent is prayer, and at the heart of prayer is one's relationship with God. Throughout Lent, focus on how you can improve your prayer life by taking time for daily prayer and shutting out distractions. Take note of how the Eucharist and communal prayer draw everyone into the sacramental life of the Church. Finally, settle into a rhythm of prayer, which can bring God deeper into the rhythm of your life. *Today's Readings: Sirach 17:20–24; Psalm 32:1–2, 5, 6, 7; Mark 10:17–27.*

Tuesday, February 28

Fasting

The practice of fasting allows our bodies to be healthier, and our minds less cluttered with distractions. Lent is the time to improve our relationship with ourselves—in our body, mind, and spirit. Lent invites us to declutter our lives and strengthen our resolve to be healthier, more mentally aware, and more focused on spiritual matters. *Today's Readings: Sirach 35:1–12; Psalm 50:5–6, 7–8, 14, 23; Mark 10:28–31.*

Ash Wednesday, March 1

Almsgiving

Often the discipline of almsgiving is perfunctory. Perhaps this is the Lent to be more intentional in how almsgiving, or finding ways to assist others in need, can improve our relationship with the world. The three disciplines of Lent, prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, challenge us to be stronger in our relationships with God, self, and others. During this season of Lent, we can resolve to fortify these relationships. *Today's Readings: Joel 2:12–18; Psalm 51:3–4, 5–6ab, 12–13, 14, 17; 2 Corinthians 5:20–6:2; Matthew 6:1–6, 16–18.*

Thursday, March 2

Take Up Your Cross

The appeal from Jesus to take up our cross daily is especially poignant the day after Ash Wednesday, because we are aware that Jesus would soon take up his Cross, along with the sins of the world. What is my cross? How can I take up that cross to save my life? This Lent, denial and the cross can be keys to a reexamination of our baptismal call. *Today's Readings: Deuteronomy 30:15–20; Psalm 1:1–2, 3, 4, 6; Luke 9:22–25.*

Friday, March 3

A Humble and Contrite Heart

Psalm 51 reminds us continually that a humble and contrite heart pleases God. From such a heart can come a worthy sacrifice. A heart that is both humble and contrite elicits God's compassion. It is also a heart which is cleansed because of the good works we have accomplished. Our good works, both corporal and spiritual, cleanse our hearts and light our path for healing. *Today's Readings: Isaiah 58:1–9a; Psalm 51:3–4, 5–6ab, 18–19; Matthew 9:14–15.*

Saturday, March 4

Tax Collectors and Sinners

In today's Gospel we hear that Jesus came to call sinners, not the righteous. At the table of the Kingdom, we must belong with Levi, tax collectors, and all other sinners. The readings today challenge us to repair the breaches in our lives, and restore ruined households. In whatever ways we can, we work to repent, and then to repair and restore what our sin has destroyed. *Today's Readings: Isaiah 58:9b–14; Psalm 86:1–2, 3–4, 5–6; Luke 5:27–32.*

