

## ASH WEDNESDAY - 2020

I imagine that most of you have noticed something different here in church.

I'm not talking about the Lenten décor ... it's pretty much the same as last year.

I am referring to our new baptismal font.

It is not finished ... and I certainly did not expect it to have running water on Ash Wednesday ... but they need to test the plumbing before they build the outer casing.

And in case those of you sitting near it think it's a little loud, please remember that it is still in the rough. It will be quieter once it is finished.

The more I think about it, it's appropriate that it is running as we begin Lent because the baptism of adults at the Easter Vigil, as well as the renewal of the promises of those already baptized, is one of the goals of our Lenten journey.

I say "one of the goals" because there are at least three aims we should keep in mind during this holy season.

The Liturgy of Ash Wednesday sets the stage for the first goal by reminding us that we are dust, and unto dust we shall return.

To put this blunt reminder in its proper context we need to go back to the very beginning, to the Book of Genesis, where we read that God created human beings out of the clay, the dust of the earth.

## 2

God then blew into the nostrils of human beings the breath of life ... the soul.

And God looked at the man and woman - created in the divine image - and found them very good.

All of creation and our earthly life is God's gift, and it is beautiful.

But the ashes with which our foreheads are about to be marked remind us that our life on earth is short compared to the eternal life of our soul.

And so, during Lent we try to focus on deepening our spiritual life by taking up the ancient practices of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving in a more intentional way.

In today's Gospel, Jesus teaches that these practices are to be performed for an earthly reward of praise, nor to gain a feeling of being spiritually self-satisfied.

Rather, during Lent we strive to allow the Lord to use these disciplines to guide us along the path that leads to deeper intimacy with him on earth, and so towards the eternal life of heaven.

In today's second reading St. Paul emphasizes the second goal of the season of Lent: reconciliation with God.

Jesus said: "I have come that you might have life, and have it more abundantly."

But you and I know that sometimes we make choices that lead away from Jesus who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

### 3

The good news is that God is merciful and does not want sinners to perish, but to live.

And so God has given us this Lent as an opportunity to repent, to seek conversion, to open ourselves once more to the abundance of God's grace and mercy.

As St. Paul declares: "Now is a very acceptable time; now is the day of salvation."

The third goal of Lent is preparation for the celebration of the Paschal feasts of Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday.

After we have gathered at the altar for the Mass of the Lord's Supper and have listened once again his command that we wash each other's feet ...

After we have heard the solemn proclamation of the Lord's Passion and have venerated his holy Cross ...

... we will arrive at the celebration of his glorious Resurrection and the Baptism, Confirmation, and First Eucharist of three of our brothers and sisters.

And, as I mentioned at the beginning of this holily, we who are already baptized will renew our baptismal promises.

This renewal is not simply an affirmation of the articles of the Creed.

Rather, if we have sought to enter into the spirit of Lent and Holy Week, it will be a rekindling of our faith in the hope and new life that Jesus offers us as his disciples.

One last thought: Lent is not only a personal spiritual journey.

Our prayer, fasting, and almsgiving train our hearts not only to draw closer to God, but also to draw closer each other as brothers and sisters in the Lord.

We are called to make our pilgrimage through Lent as true "companions on the way."

Besides your individual penance, prayer, and works of charity, I would also like to invite you to participate in our communal "Lenten Journey" among the parishes of Merrillville.

If you did not get a schedule of our weekly opportunities for communal prayer and reflection, there are copies at the doors of the church ...

... along with a "Little Black Book" of daily meditations that is our gift to you.

My brothers and sisters, although the décor of Lent reminds us of the desert in which Jesus spent 40 days before beginning his public ministry ... and the tone of our Lenten liturgies is more somber... Lent is truly meant to be a season during which we celebrate the great mercy of God who has given us his Son Jesus to be our Savior and our brother.

And so, as we will sing at the end of each of our Lenten liturgies, let us begin our journey "from ashes to the living font ... through Cross and tomb ... to Easter joy ... in Spirit-fire fulfilled."