



(The Beginning of the Lenten Season)

Wednesday, February 18, 2015

“The Day of Ashes” or Ash Wednesday, as it is more commonly known, falls on the Wednesday of the seventh week before Easter and is the date that marks the start of the Holy Lenten Season for Christians around the World. Ash Wednesday follows Mardi Gras or Shrove Tuesday. It is a time for reflection, repentance, renewal, prayer, and personal sacrifice. The Lenten Season culminates on Easter Sunday Morning with the Easter “Sonrise” Service (the Service is called this because it is supposed to mark the Resurrection hour of the Savior, the Son of God).

The actual Season is inaugurated with the imposition of “Ashes” upon the foreheads of the participants in the Seasonal Discipline. The ashes themselves are penitential signs that represent mourning and grief expressed in response to the Passion of our Lord and Christ in his ultimate sacrifice of death on the cross for the redemption of the sins of everyone who would believe in this great Salvific Act. Ashes are used in this action as a reminder of our need to repent, confess our sins, and return to God. At Shiloh, we also nailed our sins and brokenness to the wooden Cross, and they stay there for the entire season as a reminder that our salvation was bought with a price.

Matthew 6:1-6

(v. 1) "Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven. (v. 2) So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. (v. 3) But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, (v. 4) so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. (v. 5) And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. (v. 6) But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

As we now begin this journey toward Jerusalem and the cross, let us be ever mindful that whatever we do is not just a reflection of our individual faith and sense of piety, but is also a sacrifice of praise to our God who sacrificed the best of heaven for the worst of sinners like me and like you. In this season of self-denial don't just "give up" something, but strive to "take up" something. Take up the cross of Christ. Take up the humility of Christ. Take up the cause of Christ. Take up the joy of God's Grace freely given for you. Allow your sacrifices to be to the glory of God!

"The religious dead present a face of piety while trusting that the big check they dropped in the plate today will cover for their indulgence in the lusts of the flesh yesterday. They take a week or two to travel to a third world country and pass out rice and Bibles and that washes away any stain of indifference to the plight of their unsaved neighbor or their disdainful treatment of the unwed mother in the pew behind them. Redemption is not purchased with any of these things; not big checks

and not good deeds. God could make the stars into diamonds. He could speak and turn the planets into gold and silver and you would sell your own soul for paltry penance? Would you think to buy His favor with that which you would not have apart from His grace?" —Clark E. Tanner, Sermon Central.com.

Shiloh, Take this journey with us. Attend church each Sunday and each Wednesday night. Let us pray for and with one another. We want to grow closer and closer to God as a church family. Our goal is to encourage you along the journey as you increase your faith.

During the next 40 days we must seriously **REFLECT** upon our sins. They are many. Don't fake it! Lent is a season to be real with God and real with ourselves.

We must **REPENT**, which means to turn away from old and destructive patterns of living. It is not enough to stop the sin. We must hate it!

We must **RESOLVE** to live in Godly ways, ways that please God. This can only be done as we love the Lord with all of our heart, soul and might **AND** as we love our neighbor as we love ourselves.

PRAYER: Gracious God, we now start a journey, closer we would draw to the Cross where our salvation was sealed. We stand, by the power of the Holy Ghost, against any distraction that would stymie our progress. We submit ourselves to what You will do in our lives, Lord. In Jesus' Name. Amen!