

Ash Wednesday

Blow the trumpet in Zion, proclaim a fast, call an assembly.

In ancient times, the sounding of a trumpet or rams horn was a clarion call to war, to prepare for a serious battle. The assembly that gathered stood before God for help, their fasting an admission that they brought disaster upon themselves by disobeying God's law. Now as enemy stood at the gates and having repented of their sinful ways, the Chosen People sought to have God on their side once again.

We gather annually on Ash Wednesday for similar reasons. Selfishness, greed and pride too often rule our lives. The law of self, not of God, the example of our insubordinate fallen first parents, not the example of the obedient Christ is what we have offered the world.

Rend your hearts, not your garments. Internalize what is happening here externally today. We were mere dust when God breathed life into us, when God ensouled us, and when we return to dust what kind of soul will we present to our maker? A spirit, a soul that used God's grace to put God and neighbor above self? Or one that is indulgent, calling upon God only when needed and using neighbors for our own selfish ends? But for God's life in us, God's breath in us we are but dust. The Lord calls us to turn that life over to him this Lent, to make a complete gift of self to him.

We will do so by claiming Christ, not self, as Lord. By imitating him in deeper daily prayer, especially for us sacramental prayer – celebrating the sacrament of Penance and sharing more often and fervently in the Eucharistic sacrifice. To reduce our dependence on material things by fasting, as Jesus did. And to deeds of justice and charity to others through almsgiving.

We do not become the true Christian self which the Lord wants us to be by drifting along, satisfying every appetite. Being a Christian can only take the form of becoming a Christian every day, with God's grace – so abundant in Lent – resisting the pull of gravity toward our lower nature and offering us the joy that should be ours as privileged disciples of Jesus Christ.

So blow the trumpet, proclaim a fast, call an assembly. “We implore you, on behalf of Christ, be reconciled with God.”