

Never Alone

Ash Wednesday 2010

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

With Ash Wednesday we begin our annual Lenten journey.
The practice of the imposition of ashes predates the Christian church.
In fact, Homer, supposedly, in the Iliad, in 800BC,
 makes mention of the practice amongst the Greeks.
The symbolic fittingness lent itself to the Jewish and Christian traditions.
Hence, our use of ashes this day.

The ashes traditionally signify sadness.
The sadness which they signify, however, are not vague or abstract sadness.
The sadness is with respect to a person.
We are normally sad only when we first have loved.
We are normally sad when we have not loved our beloved.
The Lord is our Beloved.
Thus, the ashes really signify, as the first reading says,

- that we recognize that we have not always loved the Lord
- that seek to return to the Lord with our whole hearts

The time period is deliberate: 40 days.
Who spent 40 days in the desert?
Christ spent 40 days in the desert.
During Lent we, in fact, go to “the desert”.
We go not in imitation of Christ but *with* Christ,
We go preceded by Christ, in search of Christ, sure to find Christ.

What is the desert?
The desert is above all a place of aloneness.
And in the aloneness, *aloneness with Christ*,
there is a purification and simplification that can occur.

In the desert, in order to make ourselves available
to Him Who is “stirred to concern” (Joel 2:18),
we adopt certain traditional practices
more particularly characteristic of this season, of this journey:
 prayer, fasting, almsgiving

We pray and fast and give alms as a way
of rending our hearts that they be renewed.

We pray and fast and give alms as a way of fixing our hearts on Him who is

- gracious and merciful
- rich in kindness

We pray and fast and give alms as a way of expressing our desire for Christ.

Lent is always about the heart.

Hence, Jesus' promise to those who act from the heart, for the sake of love:

“My Father who sees in secret *will* repay you.”

The Father wishes to bless us.

The Father wishes to renew us.

Let us rejoice.

The sadness that surfaces in the desert
is always superseded by joy that Christ bestows
in drawing us back to His heart.

“Behold, now is a very acceptable time;

behold, now is the day of salvation.” (2nd reading: II Corinthians 6:2)