

## Ash Wednesday 2008

*Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18*

Today we begin our annual Lenten journey: 40 days

- like Christ in the desert .
- *with* Christ in the desert.

During Lent we, in fact, go to the desert, with Christ.

What is the desert?

- a place of aloneness
- a place of purification
- a place of simplicity
- a place where our cries can be heard echoing

We go to the desert *in response to an invitation* (cf. 1<sup>st</sup> rdg: Joel 2:12-18)  
an invitation from the Lord *to return to Him with our whole hearts.*

How are we to do that?

- with joyous fasting and joyous weeping and joyous mourning
- by rending our hearts

With our eyes fixed on Him who is

- gracious and merciful
- rich in kindness

we are to

- acknowledge that we have failed when it comes to love.
- let *Him* refashion our hearts.

Lent is a season of particular fasting and penance,

but these practices, which we are asked to practice, are about the heart.

We give alms and pray and fast as a way of

- “making room” for Jesus in our hearts
- expressing our desire for Jesus

It is 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.

We must “rend our hearts” like the dry, hard soil that is plowed.  
If we do so, the Father will repay us with life-giving waters,  
waters that will cleanse and refresh and heal.  
Indeed, the term “Lent” comes from an Anglo-Saxon term meaning “spring”.

The ashes we are to receive recall that we are dust, i.e., that without Him we are nothing.  
We have been made from nothingness, creations *out of pure love*.  
And as our existence is sheer gift, so too is salvation,  
which is ultimately the sheer gift of eternal life.

The ashes are but an exterior sign, however.  
The Eucharist really communicates eternal life (uhum: please do stay for Communion...).  
We are to receive this love that saves and lasts,  
unworthily, but happily, and full of hope, as a gift,  
practicing what the Church invites during this special season as an expression of

- our desire
- our cooperation
- our gratitude

The invitation has been extended. The Lord is present. Our Father’s arms are open.  
Truly “now is a *very* acceptable time. *Now* is the day of salvation”. (2<sup>nd</sup> rdg. II Cor. 5:20-6:2)