

Ash Wednesday B (2/25/09 – *Christ, the Creed, and Humility*)

In the Name JESUS. [Amen]

Prayer ... fasting ... repentance: these are the things of *Lent* – at least from our side. But surely not *Lent* only – no ... this must be our daily life. Just as Baptism signifies *that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity*, so the prayer and fasting and repentance of *Ash Wednesday* and *Lent* should be daily.

Our lives must be wholly dedicated to God – that's what the prayer and fasting are all about. As our Lord said to satan when tempted by him to make bread from stones: *Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God* [MT 4.4]. Fasting is the remembrance of this truth ... whether one actually fasts or not – though fasting is, indeed, a fine outward training and disciplining of the flesh ... for those who are able to do so. *Lent* is a time dedicated to remembering this truth – more than that ... it is a time dedicated to living out this truth ... with additional preaching and meditation on the Word of God by which we live ... all with the goal of preparing us to remember that the Word humbled Himself and died on the Cross that we might live by Him.

We turn to God in prayer – and we hear His Word. The needs and tribulations of life force us to our knees ... and with the psalmist we turn to God with those needs – ever returning to the Word of God that we might hear Him speak to us regarding these needs ... and more importantly, His solution. There we hear God speak His Word of comfort which assures us that because of Christ's humiliation and ultimate exaltation we have a gracious Father Who will provide not only the needs of the body but also and especially the needs – the eternal needs – of our soul. In our devotions we hear the Word of God ... and are driven to our knees in prayer – either because in the Word we have seen where we have fallen short of the glory of God ... or because God's grace is there revealed and we cannot help but pray and give thanks for His infinite goodness.

But above all *Lent* – and the entire Christian life – is one of repentance. Our worship and prayers have faltered. Rather than discipline our bodies with fasting, we have so easily given in to the temptations and lusts of the flesh. Rather than regularly set aside time for hearing and meditating on God's Word and praying, we ignore it ... disdain it ... and instead occupy our minds and lives with so many transitory temporal treats and tidbits. And we know that our end is the dust of death.

Or is it? Yes, we were made from the dust of the earth. Yes, we shall one day return there. But that is **not** the end. For our Lord Jesus Christ *suffered under*

*Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried* – seemingly left in the dust of death – **not** for His own sake ... but for **ours**. Our Lord Jesus Christ suffered His humiliation – humbling Himself to be born of the Virgin Mary as though one of His own creatures to unite Himself **with** us ... subjecting Himself to the Law to fulfill it **for** us ... allowing Himself to be wrongly treated and crucified **by** us ... dying a death **like** ours ... undergoing a burial – **not** for Himself ... **not** because it was His nature ... **not** because He deserved it for any sin He had committed ... **but for us and for our eternal salvation**.

And just as Christ was made alive by the Spirit – and even *descended into hell* to proclaim His ultimate victory – so we too, though laid in the dust of the earth, shall be made alive by the Spirit and shall have the victory which our Lord Jesus Christ has purchased and won for us **precisely** by means of His humiliation ... His suffering and death on the Cross.

It is precisely by the events we consider during *Lent* – **not** from **our** side ... but from the **Lord's** – that we know the truth spoken by the prophet JOEL. For when we *return to the LORD our God ... He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love* [2.13]. When we are brought to our knees in repentance, we know that *Between the vestibule and the altar ... the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep and say, "Spare Your people, O LORD"* [2.17] – and the Lord hears ... and the Lord acts ... because of Christ's work of humiliation. For, since Christ allowed Himself to be reproached by all – including the Father ... in our stead – the reproach has been removed from us.

As the Apostle says: *For our sake [God] made Him to BE sin Who knew NO sin, so that in HIM we might become the righteousness of God* [2COR 5.21]. In Christ we are made *the righteousness of God* – the righteousness that belongs to God ... the righteousness that comes from God ... the righteousness renders us pleasing to God (such that we do not remain in the dust of death forever ... but shall be raised in the flesh like our Lord and made immortal) ... the righteousness that allows us to stand before God and live ... forever.

As we go through this *Lententide* – especially as we hear the preaching on *Christ, the Creed, and Humility* ... **and** the beginning of His exaltation when *He descended into hell* to proclaim His once-for-all victory over sin, devil, and death – let us return to the LORD with all our hearts ... knowing that *He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love* [JOEL 2.13] ... because of Christ's humiliation and exaltation.

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. [Amen]