

“Living in Our Bodies the Discipline of Lent to Please the One We Love”

Homily – Ash Wednesday

February 10, 2016, St. Mary of the Assumption Cathedral

Once again this year, as we do every year on this day, we will receive ashes on our forehead as a sign of our penance – ashes and sackcloth, of course, being the sign in biblical times of mourning, and so we mourn our sins. We mourn our sins because our sins offend God. The ashes on our forehead that mar our appearance also remind us of the humility we need, the humility to turn to the Lord with trust in His mercy and forgiveness, knowing that the Lord does not spurn a humble and contrite heart. We live the spirit of penance in our bodies in very practical ways, just as our Lord calls us to in the Gospel reading just proclaimed, the Gospel reading for this Mass every year on Ash Wednesday: our Lord calling us to prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

We live this discipline in our bodies and in how we spend our time and how we spend our money: spending extra time in prayer to get closer to the Lord and invite Him into our hearts; with our acts of charity, taking extra steps during this time of Lent to extend the love of Christ to those in need, and with generosity with the treasure the Lord has blessed us with, as well, so that we might assist the poor. We live this out in practical, very real ways. It begins with humility, though, recognizing that we have sinned and are in need of God’s mercy. It is also the purpose of our prayer, penance, and almsgiving. As the Lord exhorts us in the Gospel, when we pray, when we fast, when we give alms, we are not to do so for show, not to do so for the approval of people, but only so that we might please God. That must be our greatest desire.

We engage in this Lenten discipline, these acts of self-restraint – as we mentioned and as we prayed in our Opening Prayer – so that our desires, our intentions, our motivations might be purified, that we might do all for God because we love God. When you love someone you always want to please them; you always want to please the one you love. May God accompany us throughout these forty days, then, that, ever more purified, ever more trusting in His mercy and forgiveness, we might please Him by our life of prayer and by our assistance to the poor and the needy.