

Ash Monday

“**The Joy of Lent**” (Regnum Christi Meditation for Ash Wednesday of 2020 Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18 [Audio version *](#))

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Jesus said to his disciples: “Take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them; otherwise, you will have no recompense from your heavenly Father. When you give alms, do not blow a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets to win the praise of others. Amen, I say to you they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your almsgiving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you. When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners so that others may see them. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you. When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, they neglect their appearance so that they may appear to be fasting. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to be fasting, except to your Father who is hidden. And your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you. Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Introductory Prayer: Lord, you know how much I need you and depend on you. You know my weakness and my faults. I put all my confidence in your love and mercy in my daily actions. I hope to learn to trust more in your power, your promise, and your grace. Lord, I wish to start this season of Lent with a sincere desire to grow in love, preparing myself worthily to celebrate the mysteries of your passion, death and resurrection.

Petition: Lord, help me learn to change what needs to change in my life.

1. **Prayer, Fasting, Almsgiving:** As we begin the Lenten season, we are reminded of the need to make reparation for our sins and be reconciled with God. Any attempt to build a spiritual life that neglects the pillars of prayer, fasting and almsgiving is building on sand. Prayer purifies our intentions and relates all we do to God. Fasting detaches us from our comfort and from ourselves. Almsgiving reflects our brotherhood with the poor of Jesus' family and reminds us that our true wealth is not in things, but in the love of God. We all need to do a reality check on our spiritual lives to make sure we are committed to prayer, fasting and almsgiving.
2. **Lose the Show:** Jesus is severe in criticizing the hypocrites who parade their works before others to get attention. Such parades are of no use in pleasing God or making up for our sins; they only add to our sinfulness. He encourages us to pray in private, to fast and to give alms in secret, without calling the attention of others to what we are doing. In this way we can be sure we are doing all for love of God and not for love of self. Those who make an outward show of piety or generosity "have already received their reward" in this world, and they store up no treasure in heaven. Let us work silently and discreetly, with no other intention but pleasing God alone.
3. **Joyful Sacrifice:** Nothing brings us closer to Christ than walking alongside him and doing the things he did for love of God the Father. During Lent, God invites us to purify our hearts and minds and to turn our intentions back to him. Christ's public ministry was lived each day in loving obedience to the Father's will. Our Lenten program should reflect that same simple, yet demanding, obedience and love. What can I do for God today? What sacrifice can I offer that will be pleasing to him? Once I decide on it, I will carry it out with no one else knowing.

Conversation with Christ: Jesus, give me the grace to begin this Lent with great enthusiasm and love. Help me live it with joy, knowing that I am living it in your presence to please you and you alone.

Resolution: I will make a Lenten program of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

** The Gospel read in the Maronite Catholic Church on Ash Monday is Matthew 6:16-21. The above meditation from Regnum Christi is based on the Gospel of Ash Wednesday in the Roman Catholic Church Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18. The verses 19 and 21 were added to the Gospel above.*