

## **Ash Wednesday March 2, 2022**

On this Ash Wednesday, we gather here because we recognize that we have a dangerous disease - the disease of sin. We see its harmful effects within us and all around us. Sin makes us selfish and jealous. It ruins our relationships. It damages our health. It makes us sad and fearful. The worst part is that we have done it to ourselves. We have made choices that have hurt us and others. But our pride so often keeps us from reaching out to the one who can heal us - Jesus Christ.

Sin is a disease that has sunk its roots deep in us. There is no one here who hasn't hurt someone or who hasn't been hurt by someone. All of us are carrying a burden of suffering because of the sins we have committed and because of the sins committed against us. At the beginning of this Lenten Season, the Church offers us powerful medicine to reverse the effects of sin in our lives and to cure its effects in our hearts. Jesus speaks about this medicine in today's gospel - they are the practices of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

Prayer is simply raising our minds and hearts to God. It means bringing ourselves to God just as we are and being honest. Just as we do when we visit a doctor, we tell God where it hurts. We admit what we have done wrong and ask Him to help us put it right. In prayer, we come face-to-face with the God who loves us unconditionally. The only way to heal the effects of sin in our lives is through a strong dose of God's love. Only love frees the mind from being focused only on what's wrong with us and the world. By putting us in touch with the God who does miracles, prayer opens us up to all that is possible and so frees our heart from fear. When we accept God's forgiveness, we then are empowered to forgive others. Real healing from sin is possible when we spend time with our Heavenly Father in prayer.

Therefore, we should spend some time every day getting a treatment of prayer. We only need to find a quiet place where we can be alone and focus our minds and hearts on God. There is no right way to pray just as there is no right way to talk to a friend. We simply need to allow our hearts to rise up to God and He will take it from there. If we spend time in prayer, we will find the peace our hearts have been yearning

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for and that our sin has stolen from us.

A second powerful medicine is almsgiving. Almsgiving simply means performing acts of charity for others. It could mean serving at a soup kitchen or giving money to a homeless person. It could involve praying for others. Any kind of good work that benefits others can be an act of almsgiving.

Why is almsgiving such powerful medicine? Because sin makes us selfish. It keeps us obsessed with ourselves and our needs and isolates us from others. When we open our hearts and our hands to serve others, we are freed from obsession with ourselves. Sin tries to convince us that the only way we can be happy is by making sure our needs are met. But, when we give of our time, energy, and money, we discover that true happiness and joy come from serving others. By taking time during this Lenten Season to engage in some form of charity for others, we will be healed of our obsession with ourselves and find a real connection with others.

The third treatment for sin that Jesus offers us today is fasting. It means going without food for a period of time or abstaining from some types of food like meat or desserts. Fasting helps strengthen our resolve. By saying “no” to something good, we are free to say “yes” to something better. And if we can say “no” to something good like dessert, it is more likely that we will say “no” to something bad like sin.

During Lent, we traditionally make some type of sacrifice. That is an important way for us to grow in our self-control. Fasting and sacrifice also teach us to rely on God. When our sacrifice becomes too difficult and when we are tempted to give up, it teaches us to raise our hearts and minds to God and ask for His help. We cannot do it on our own. Only by leaning on God’s love for us can we do any good whether it be going without food or going without sin. So fasting is powerful medicine that reverses sin’s hold on us and frees us to love God and serve others.

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Prayer, almsgiving, and fasting are powerful medicine. We need all those practices because sin is a dangerous and deadly disease that keeps us from experiencing an intimate relationship with our Heavenly Father. Many people resist this powerful medicine just as many doctors and patients resisted chemotherapy when it first came out. But there is no other way to be healed and to restore our hope that we can have a full, abundant life free from whatever could harm us.

We can have friendship with God. He created us with hearts that desire Him above everything else. By practicing prayer, almsgiving, and fasting in some form during these forty days, our relationship with God will be stronger and our attachment to sin will be weaker. When Easter comes, we will have a taste of the freedom that God desires for us and celebrate with joy the victory that Jesus won for us through His cross and resurrection.