

ASH WEDNESDAY REFLECTION



Ash Wednesday: Climbing the Holy Mountain to Easter

By Christopher Carstens

Dust and ashes are distinguishing marks of Lent’s opening days. It is no accident that the Ash Wednesday service is one of the most popular Lenten observances, even for non-Catholics. Even for the nominally religious, ashes on the forehead contain a certain symbolic appeal, speaking not only of our origins but of our end. For, as ashes are placed upon our heads, we hear the words, “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

But Ash Wednesday is only the first step. As we go deeper into Lent, the liturgy further sharpens this focus on our ultimate destination.

On the Sunday following Ash Wednesday, the First Reading presents the creation account, which takes us even further back to our dusty roots in the Garden of Eden. Here we read how “the Lord God formed the man out of the dust of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being” (Gen. 2:7). We were made from dust, and with the Fall we descend back into dust. We are reminded of this fact of life (and death) in the Ash Wednesday blessing over the ashes, when we “acknowledge we are but ashes and shall return to dust.”

But the ashes do more than recall our own fall: they should remind us that our transgression has turned the entire cosmos to chaos. We have brought down not just ourselves but all of creation with us. Not long after Adam and Eve’s creation, “out of the ground the Lord God made grow every tree that was delightful to look at and good for food, with the tree of life in the middle of the garden” (Gen. 2:9). But with Adam’s sin (the name *Adam* means “earth” or “ground”), all of the ground is cursed (Gen. 3:17), as well as the vegetation that comes from it. It is fitting, then, that Ash Wednesday’s ashes are “made from the olive branches or branches of other trees that were blessed the previous year.” Earth’s trees and plants that were once alive are themselves reduced to dust, as an anticipation of our own death.

So, Ash Wednesday and Lent, especially its early weeks, remind us that we humans (*human*, like *Adam*, means “earthly”) are given life from the ground by God’s will, but that we shall return to the ground by the free choice of our will. Thus far, not a happy story. But at least there is nowhere to go but up!

But listen to the first words on the Church’s Lenten lips. The entrance antiphon for Ash Wednesday declares, “You are merciful to all, O Lord, and despise nothing that you have made. You overlook people’s sins, to bring them to repentance, and you spare them, for you are the Lord our God” (Wis. 11:24, 25, 26). True, we have reduced ourselves to dust, but this is not where the story ends.

God’s mercy, as Lent’s first proclamation says, overlooks the chasm of our sins and restores us to life. As the psalmist puts it: “He raises the needy from the *dust*, lifts the poor from the *ash* heap, Seats them with princes, the princes of the people” (Ps. 113:7-8). If creation raised us from the dust, and original sin returned us to dust, Lent and Easter will raise us up once more and bring us across that bridge that separates us from God.

But passing over has never been an easy task. Moses found the work exhausting (“If this is the way you will deal with me,” he complained to God, “then please do me the favor of killing me at once, so that I need no longer face my distress!” [Num. 11:15]). Joshua, who led the people into the promised land after Moses’ death, also knew the difficulty involved in passing over.

Recall how he and Caleb encouraged the frightened people to enter the Promised Land: “If the LORD is pleased with us, he will bring us in to this land and give it to us, a land which flows with milk and honey. Only do not rebel against the LORD! You need not be afraid of the people of the land, for they are but food for us!” (Num. 14:8–9). Similarly, both Elijah and Ruth passed over to new life only by great effort and toil.

Consider the anguished pleas of Elisha before Elijah, and Orpah and Ruth before Naomi, prior to their respective passovers (see 2 Kings 2; Ruth 1). Anyone who has ever prayed the Stations of the Cross knows, too, that the same exertions accompanied Jesus’ Passover. Perhaps this is why both Moses and Elijah appear with Jesus at His Transfiguration — to give Him encouragement. The same challenge, too, opens before us in Lent.

Conclusion

The Church likens the Lenten season to climbing “the Holy mountain of Easter,” (*Paschalis Sollemnitatis*, no. 6). On the far side of the paschal bridge, from the vantage point of the Easter victory, the Church looks back on Christ’s (and our) work and calls it a “stupendous combat” where death and life fought a bitter battle. It’s a battle worth fighting, and a battle we can win.

But part of our success sees the goal, the end, the purpose: the Paschal Mystery, where we work with Jesus to span heaven and earth. And unless there is a bridge in our sights on Ash Wednesday, our journey through Lent risks ending where we began: right here in the fallen and dusty world of sin. It is a good thing we have a captain, coworkers and the tools necessary for victory.

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MASSES & SERVICES

**Saturday Anticipated Mass:** 5pm  
**Sunday Masses:** 9am, 11am, 5pm

**Mon – Wed Masses:** 8am

**Thurs Mass & OLPH Novena:**

8am & 12pm Noon

**1<sup>st</sup> Thurs:** 12pm Mass/Novena/  
Healing Prayers

**Fri, Sat & Holidays:** 9am Mass

**Fri in July & August:** 8am Mass

**Children’s Mass:** 9am 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday  
of the month Oct-June

**Children’s Liturgy:** 11am

All Sundays except the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday  
from Sept- June

Reconciliation

Saturday 4pm - 4:45pm

Adoration

Saturday 9:30-10am

OFFICE HOURS

Monday-Friday 9am-4pm

CLERGY & STAFF

Pastor

Babu Mathew, CSsR

Associate Pastor

Joseph Horo, CSsR

Office Manager

Virginia Fong

Pastoral Coordinator

Bertilla Watanabe

Bookkeeper

Corinna Siy

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Olphchurchvancouver



OUR LADY OF PERPETUAL HELP PARISH

February 23, 2020

7<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

Ash Wednesday begins a time for Prayer and Introspection

Dear Parishioners,

Ash Wednesday this week marks the beginning of the season of Lent. It is not necessarily a time of gloom but it is a good time for some spiritual introspection. The three pillars of Lent are prayer, fasting and almsgiving. These are absolutely necessary but there are other ways to inspire ourselves to a deeper faith life.

Reading good spiritual books is one. We have a somewhat underutilized library in the Madonna Room which holds some good classics to spur you into reflection. Books on spirituality and meditation are great ways to go deeper into the faith in gentle ways. We have books by Thomas Merton, John Main, a few editions of the Collected Works of St Theresa of Avila. Reading about the saints, by the saints, can also be deeply inspiring. We have books on St Therese of Lisieux, Padre Pio, Pope John Paul II and St Faustina.

You won’t find many books by St Alphonsus Liguori and other Redemptorist saints in the Madonna Room library because these are kept in the rectory. St Alphonsus wrote passionately on the Passion of Christ. Many of his works can be found online too. For a sampling of his best writings, you can look forward to a retreat being planned by our Redemptorist Associates for a Saturday morning in March.

Coming up more immediately is the start of our Lenten Series *Follow Me* by theologian, author and well-known Catholic evangelist, Dr Edward Sri. Using the Gospel of St John, Dr. Sri emphasizes how we can find the answers we seek in our everyday trials through some of the key characters in Scripture. The *Follow Me* series will take place immediately after the Stations of the Cross starting this Friday. We won’t be purchasing the workbooks. You can order these on your own if you like. They are available at ascensionpress.com.

Let us ask our Blessed Mother for help in deepening and enriching our faith lives this Lent as we begin this season with fasting, prayers and Mass on Ash Wednesday.

Yours in Christ,  
Fr. Babu Mathew, CSsR

Christ Carrying the Cross

**Giovanni Bellini, 1505 – 1510, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston**

*In the late fifteenth century, new types of private devotional pictures emerged in Italy. This painting is innovative in its depiction of strong emotion to aid prayer and meditation. The subject has been excerpted from narrative representations of Christ carrying the cross to Mount Calvary.*

*However, lacking distracting details or any indication of setting, this image focuses instead on the tear-streaked face of Christ, which looks out at us in melancholy, as well as the knotty wood cross over which he casts a shadow. It is an intimate and intensely personal depiction of a suffering more emotional than physical.*

*This type of dramatic close-up was perfected by Giovanni Bellini, who was influenced by devotional images derived from the work of Leonardo da Vinci.*

*Love your neighbours and pray for those who persecute you. - Matthew 5:44*



The Lord is merciful and gracious - Psalm 103



## NEWS & NOTICES

**Weekly Collection:** Sunday Mass Offering Feb 15 & 16: \$4,386.60. Offering for the Needy: \$83. Icon of Love Scholarship Fund: \$300. OLPH Youth Ministry: \$300. BC Catholic: \$22. Thank you for your faith-filled generosity.

**Ash Wednesday Masses:** On February 26 at 8am, 9am with OLPH School & 7pm.

**Stations of the Cross:** Join us for the Stations of the Cross to meditate on the suffering of the Lord. Starting this Friday at 7pm.

**Second Collection - St. Joseph's Society:** A collection for the St. Joseph's Society will be taken on the weekend of Sunday, March 1 at all parishes. This special collection helps ensure retired priests as well as ill or disabled priests are taken care of. Thank you for giving generously.

**2020 Envelope Box Pickup:** Your 2020 Sunday envelopes will no longer be in the Church foyer for pickup. Envelope boxes will be kept in the parish office and can be picked up Monday- Friday during office hours.

**Filipino Ministry Prayer Gathering:** All are invited to join the Mathew 7:7 Prayer Brigade at OLPH this weekend Sunday Feb. 23 from 1-4pm in the Hall. We unite in prayer for the success of our Archdiocese's *Proclaim Movement*, for God's blessings on our ongoing celebration of the 500th Year of Christianity in the Philippines, for the sanctification of the ordained ministry and consecrated persons, for the healing of illness, for justice and peace in the world and for the intentions of families in our Archdiocese. Petitions and thanksgiving boxes will be provided. These will be brought to the Blessed Sacrament before the start of Adoration.

**Share Lent Workshop:** Development and Peace-Caritas Canada invites you to live an ecological conversion and to take concrete actions to preserve the future of our Earth and of present and future generations. Join us on Saturday, Feb. 29 from 9:30am until 12:30pm at St. Augustine's Church for our ShareLent Workshop: For Our Common Home.

**Save 15% on Sacred Burial Space:** New crypt and cremation niche options are available at your Archdiocesan Catholic Cemetery, Gardens of Gethsemani. Prime locations going fast! Available on a first come, first booked basis. Book an appointment before March 31, 2020 and get 15% off your purchase. Applicable on burial space (not on services or memorialization). Cannot be combined with other offers. Call 604-531-2141 or register online at [HolyAngelsatGardens.ca](http://HolyAngelsatGardens.ca)

**Marriage Anniversary Mass 2020:** Celebrate your Milestone Anniversary t his Mother's Day with Archbishop Miller. We will be honouring couples celebrating their 5th, 10th, 15th, 20th, 25th, 30th, 35th, 40th, 45th, 50th, 55th & 60th+ years of marriage. Mass will be on Sunday, May 10, at 2:30pm at St. Clare of Assisi Parish in Coquitlam followed by a reception in the parish hall. All are welcome to witness and celebrate the milestone anniversaries of others. Register today at [rcav.org/marriage-anniversary](http://rcav.org/marriage-anniversary).

**Pro-Life Mass and Prayer Vigil:** One of the fundamental answers to abortion is prayer. Please join your voice with ours as we pray on the first Saturday of each month at a different parish for a new culture of life. Mass will be at 9am on Saturday, March 7 at Precious Blood Parish in Surrey. For upcoming dates, visit [rcav.org/pro-life-mass-and-prayer-vigil](http://rcav.org/pro-life-mass-and-prayer-vigil)



## Stewardship Reflection

*“But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...” (Matthew 5:44)*

Love your enemies, easier said than done, no doubt. But, remember, the foundation of stewardship is prayer. When we are in close communication with God, it opens our heart and it turns our attention away from “me” and moves it towards God and others. It allows us to have a little more empathy for “our enemy.” When we pray for others, even “our enemies,” maybe it softens their hearts as well.

*Stewardship Office, Archdiocese of St. Louis*

## CALENDAR

### FEBRUARY

#### Lenten Series

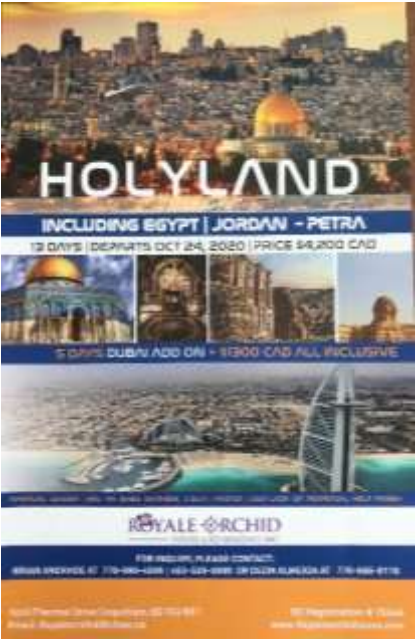


Following Christ takes more than simply believing in him or doing what he asks of us. Jesus wants you to be more than just a believer — He wants you to be his disciple and friend. *Follow Me: Meeting Jesus in the Gospel of John* is your guide to a personal encounter with Christ. As the Good Shepherd, Jesus seeks after us. He comes to meet us and beckons us to follow him. He calls us to be his disciples, to trust him, to open ourselves to his merciful love, and to love others as he has loved us. *Follow Me* invites you to experience the joy of a renewed friendship with Christ.  
**7:20 – 8pm Madonna Room**  
**Every Friday of Lent from 28 Feb after Stations of the Cross at 7pm**

#### Lenten Retreat

Redemptorists Associates Retreat: Meditations on the Cross by St Alphonsus Liguori Saturday March 28. Coffee at 9:30am in the Hall. 10am – Noon Talks & Meditation in the Church

#### Holy Land Pilgrimage



## Five Tips to Get You Ready For Lent

*Take a page from the Orthodox tradition — get ready now, so you can make the most of Lent.*

**By Anna O’Neil**

I’m full of ideas for how to improve my spiritual life, but my mantra has been “I’ll do it in Lent.” What better time to pull myself together? But every year when Lent does arrive it comes like a thief in the night which is ridiculous since I had plenty of warning after all. Year after year, I’m unprepared and find myself scrambling to make resolutions that I think I can keep.

In this regard, I recently got an unexpected bit of help from the Orthodox tradition. I discovered a gem from them about how they approach the time before Lent begins.

They see the Sundays leading up to Lent, called “Pre-Lent,” as a time of special preparation so that when Lent finally comes, they are prepared to give it their all. It just goes to show how important Lent is, and how vital the work of repentance is, that there is a time set aside to *prepare* for a time of *preparation*.

Here are a few simple ways that I’m going to try to get my soul in order this year, so that I’m ready for Lent when it comes.

#### 1. Get moving physically

Being made of both body and soul, I’m still inclined to forget how much the body tends to influence the state of my soul. The days when I sit around on the couch for hours, I’m much, much less likely to have the energy to do the right thing. I give less time to my family, I’m less attentive to my husband, and I’m generally depressed about my own state of affairs, which leads to a subtle sense of hopelessness. But on the days when I’ve taken a walk, or exercised a bit, it couldn’t be more different. I’m more cheerful, more hopeful, and have more energy to give to my family. It’s the perfect state of mind to try to begin to make changes in my life.

#### 2. Get moving mentally

Feed your mind. Even if you aren’t doing spiritual reading, any reading at all might help more than you think. Just reading a whole article, instead of just the headline and then a quick skim, has a way of fostering the habit of following through on what you’ve started. It helps me learn not to give up easily. And the mind, like any muscle, needs to be used, to stay strong. Using your mind more often can help deepen your understanding of your faith, which is rich beyond measure, and has so much to offer.

#### 3. Start noticing your problem areas

You don’t have to pick your resolutions yet, but now is the time to start thinking about what areas of your life need to be revived. Has your temper been especially short lately? A good examination of conscience will direct you to resolutions that are personally right for you, and help you see your Lenten goals more clearly. There’s also that old gimmick: try to name the seven deadly sins. The one you have the most trouble remembering is the one you may be struggling with.

#### 4. Get yourself to the sacraments

If you’ve already made a good examination of conscience, don’t waste it. Go to confession! If you have time for daily Mass or Adoration, even if it’s just once, you won’t regret it. It’s always the best possible decision to try to get closer to Jesus. That’s the whole point of our life after all.

#### 5. Pray, pray, pray

You don’t have to be in the mood, you don’t have to have energy, and you don’t have to have anything to say for your prayer to be a good one. What matters is perseverance. Never underestimate the power of forming a habit. It’s so hard at first but once it’s part of your routine, it becomes second nature. And wouldn’t you love it if daily prayer was second nature to you?

[www.aleteia.org](http://www.aleteia.org)

## THE SEASON OF LENT



## Is Ash Wednesday a Holy Day of Obligation?

While Ash Wednesday (March 6) is not a Holy Day of Obligation, all Roman Catholics are encouraged to attend Mass on this day and to receive ashes on their foreheads in order to mark the beginning of the Lenten season.

**The Distribution of Ashes:** During Mass, the ashes which give Ash Wednesday its name are distributed. The ashes are made by burning the blessed palms that were distributed the previous year on Palm Sunday; many churches ask their parishioners to return any palms that they took home so that they can be burned. After the priest blesses the ashes and sprinkles them with holy water, the faithful come forward to receive them. The priest dips his right thumb in the ashes and, making the Sign of the Cross on each person's forehead, says, "Remember, man, that thou art dust, and to dust thou shalt return" (or a variation on those words).

**A Day of Repentance:** The distribution of ashes reminds us of our own mortality and calls us to repentance. In the early Church, Ash Wednesday was the day on which those who had sinned, and who wished to be readmitted to the Church, would begin their public penance. The ashes that we receive are a reminder of our own sinfulness, and many Catholics leave them on their foreheads all day as a sign of humility.

**Fasting and Abstinence Are Required:** The Church emphasizes the penitential nature of Ash Wednesday by calling us to fast and abstain from meat. Catholics who are over the age of 14 and under the age of 60 are required to fast, which means that they can eat only one complete meal and two smaller ones during the day, with no food in-between. Catholics are also required to refrain from eating any meat, or any food made with meat, on Ash Wednesday.

**Taking Stock of Our Spiritual Life:** This fasting and abstinence is not simply a form of penance, however; it is also a call for us to take stock of our spiritual lives. As Lent begins, we should set specific spiritual goals we would like to reach before Easter and decide how we will pursue them—for instance, by going to daily Mass when we can and receiving the Sacrament of Confession more often.

[www.thoughtco.com](http://www.thoughtco.com)