

# ASH WEDNESDAY

So here we are, another Lent.

How many times have you embarked on this journey? What, I wonder, will be different for you this Lent? What could possibly enable this experience and encounter to be truly life changing?

I think at this moment of the people of Ukraine, Turkey, Syria, and those experiencing cyclones in New Zealand and Madagascar. I think of those who struggle each day with the decisions concerning what food to buy, what economies they simply must make, what medical care they cannot afford. I think of young Thomas whose intention is on our prayer board and the countless thousands caught up in desperate situations. In the context of so many difficult realities – our decision not to eat biscuits, sweets, chocolate, or drink alcohol, seems so trivial – almost obscene.

Lent is inviting us on a journey, a journey that will make a difference. What difference? What real difference will this Lent make and to whom. There will be a prayer that will be posted on our website.

Lord, give me the courage to:

Fast from judging others;  
Feast on Christ dwelling in them.  
Fast from fear of illness;  
Feast on the healing power of God.  
Fast from words that pollute;  
Feast on speech that purifies.  
Fast from discontent;  
Feast on gratitude.  
Fast from anger;  
Feast on patience.  
Fast from pessimism;  
Feast on hope.  
Fast from negatives;  
Feast on encouragement.  
Fast from bitterness;  
Feast on forgiveness.  
Fast from self-concern;  
Feast on compassion.  
Fast from suspicion;  
Feast on truth.  
Fast from gossip;  
Feast on purposeful silence.  
Fast from problems that overwhelm;  
Feast on prayer that sustains.  
Fast from anxiety;  
Feast on faith.

Lent doesn't ask us to deprive ourselves of the little things we like - imagining that this makes God happy. Lent, as Pope Francis reminds us in his message for this year, is an opportunity to listen to Jesus and face life as it is. The world around us changes not because other people suddenly become better, but because we choose to be different, in the way we speak, approach others, feel and think about life.

The change comes about because the Word of truth, Jesus himself, is so real and vital to our way of life that He in us changes us. As Pope Benedict so clearly taught in his encyclical: *God is Love* "Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or lofty idea, but an encounter with an event, a person, which gives life new horizon and a decisive direction." The encounter with this person has impacted us so much that he influences how we decide to live. Lent cannot simply become outward observance but a relationship that brings life, hope and encouragement. It is at time when we focus on the two greatest petitions of the Our Father: 'Your kingdom come, Your Will be done on earth as it is in heaven'. God's plan and purpose is that we will truly come to know Him. That was why from all eternity the Trinity desired to enter human history in Jesus the word made flesh. The only thing that ultimately matters in life is the encounter with Jesus. Here is our goal, our destiny, our purpose, our stable security. Without Him there is no solid foundations just self-referential projects.

Lent is an opportunity to free ourselves from the restless chasing after empty time wasters. My experience teaches me that when you truly meet God everything changes – we cannot settle for mediocrity and a self-made religious fantasy. What is important about Lent is not what I choose to fast from but what I eagerly desire to feast on!

I will pray this prayer each day, not simply for myself but for all of us here – be warned – prayer works - so I know that this joyful season will be a season of change for you and for me. It will be a time of joyful encounter with Him who fills my life.

Abbot Robert Igo, OSB

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