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January 20, 2012  
Newsletter Article, February 2012

Lent comes once again to help us prepare for Easter, the celebration of Jesus' resurrection. Wednesday, February 22, is Ash Wednesday. We will offer two opportunities for you to receive communion and ashes. The first will be at 9:30 am, the other at 7:00 pm.

Ashes have long been symbolic of repentance. Throughout the history of the church they have been used in liturgies to represent the repentance and humility of the people before God. Earlier than that, ashes were used in Jewish liturgies for the same purpose. Interestingly, as the ashes serve as a reminder of repentance, they also serve as a sign of purification. God is faithful to forgive those who come to him humbly and with repentant spirits.

That's a good thing to keep in mind as you approach Lent, and as you live through the 40 days. As you come humbly before God, aware of your sins and repentant, he forgives. Indeed, the work of forgiving was done by him two millennia ago.

Lent is also a time for you to be especially aware of the state of your relationship with God. Is your faith an important part of your daily life, more than going to church on Sundays? Are you aware of God's presence and involvement in your life, in your thoughts, in the decisions you make, in the way you respond to other people, in the things you say, and in the things you do? If the answer is an unqualified "yes," then you are prepared for a blessed Lent. If your answer is "sort of," or "no," then this Lenten season may become one of the most significant times of your life spiritually.

This is your opportunity to reinforce and grow your relationship with Jesus. If it is in need of serious repair, remember that he stands ready to do the repairing, all you need do is be willing. Plan to be present for one of the Ash Wednesday liturgies. Be ready to allow God to do the work in you that he is prepared to do. During the Lenten season, spend time with him in reading and thinking about scripture. Spend time in prayer, speaking to him and, especially, listening to him. Give yourself completely to worship and praise, to being in his presence. Use the daily devotions in the Book of Common Prayer to enrich your daily spiritual life. In short, renew your relationship with Jesus this year, before you celebrate the joy of Easter.

Have a happy and blessed Lent!