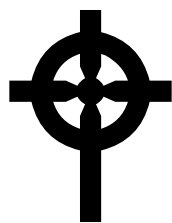


Ash Wednesday



ST. PATRICK'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

4797 Curtis Blvd Port St John FL 32927

**Ash Wednesday
February 17, 2021**

**✠ In The Name of The Father and of The Son
and of The Holy Ghost. Amen.**

The passages selected for the Sermon this evening is taken from The Book of Isaiah:

“Is this not the fast that I have chosen? To loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every heavy yoke. Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor That are cast out to thy house...then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thy health shall spring forth speedily, thy righteousness shall go before thee, and the Glory of the Lord shall be thy reward.” Isaiah 58:6-7,9

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Ash Wednesday sermons are usually about reminding us how sinful and depraved we are, how unworthy we are to receive the gift of grace so freely offered us, and commanding us to amend our behavior as we beg forgiveness from God. Consider that part of the sermon done.

This year the calendar has given us a unique juxtaposition. Today we kneel before the Lord in humility and repentance. The Cross is inscribed upon our foreheads in ashes. Sunday was Valentine's Day, a

day devoted to celebration of our loved ones. In the culture, these two days could not be more opposed, and yet, in Truth, we can link the essence of the two into a meaningful preparation for Lent.

Valentine's Day is named for St. Valentine, a Roman soldier and priest, who was martyred by the Emperor Claudius in 269AD. As he awaited his execution, he befriended the jailer's daughter, teaching her about the Lord. Legend has it he left her a note on the day that he died, February 14th, and signed it “With love, from your Valentine”.

Motivated by a Love for Jesus Christ so powerful that he would lay down his own life, this gentle Saint took time to teach the most unlikely friend, by word and especially by example, about our Lord. He did it out of Love, not only for the Lord, but for the little girl as well. He gave up that most valuable time imaginable, time which could be spent preparing for his execution, to befriend an inconsequential little girl, someone who could not affect his fate, and the daughter of his sworn enemy at that.

We give Valentines to our beloved. We profess in those cards that we love the recipient, and that we will give up the time which had heretofore been our own, to

make them happy, to do their will. It is a joyous sacrifice that we make to place their needs above our own as a symbol of our love and gratitude. We broadcast that feeling to the world, in essence glorifying our beloved by our devotion and sacrifice.

Lent can be our Valentine to Our Lord. I am sure St. Valentine would be pleased to think of it that way. This is the time when we give up pleasing ourselves and do our Father's will. We proclaim our love for God, glorify Him, by putting His will first. Of course, when we offer our time, our lives, our bodies and souls to God, He returns them to us with purpose. He doesn't stack our professions of devotion on the mantelpiece like so many trophies. He takes our pitiful lives and returns to us true life by grace, turning us outward to the care of His other beloved souls. To love our neighbors as ourselves, to feed the hungry, clothe the poor, visit the sick and bury the dead.

Is it possible to make Lent a Valentine? Can we be humble and joyous at the same time? Can we be repentant and grateful at the same time? St. Valentine must have been. Surely hundreds of prisoners passed through her father's jail, but the little girl struck up a friendship with the Saint. It was because he was joyous, because despite his awful sentence, St. Valentine was able to suffer the child to come to him, to be concerned and aware of her needs, and to spend the precious time he had left before his awful death, sharing the greatest love of all with her, the love that he had for His Lord and Savior. The reading this evening calls us to have that same joy in our fasting and preparation. We are to beg humble forgiveness, to deny ourselves

those things that satisfy our own desires, and to gladly forsake them in gratitude and repentance to glorify the Lord. When the Lord accepts our sacrifice, we are to receive it back from Him in grace, and put that gift of time, which has been liberated from pointless selfishness to the purpose of God, to care for His people as He has cared for us.

We enter into a season of penitence. Sorrow for our sins is only the beginning of Penitence. Our repentance is not complete without firm amendment of life, commitment to avoid the pride and selfishness of our sin and to turn to our Father's will. When absolution is given, it is given in three parts, to forgive and pardon us from all our sins, confirm and strengthen us in all goodness, and to bring us to everlasting life in Christ. We need to approach Lent, with the same perspective. We are sorry for our sins, we are committed to avoiding them, and ask for strength to do so by our prayer and fasting. We intend to change our lives from pursuit of our own will and satisfaction, to the Pursuit of the Father's will and care for His people. We do this all in joy, humble and repentant, but joyous and grateful to be liberated from our sin and given the gift of everlasting life in Christ.

The question for us to consider as we enter this Lent is not only, "what will we give up", but "what will we do with the time, energy and resources that God returns us." Let us have a holy fast, the kind portrayed in Isaiah, a valentine of gratitude to our Lord, Jesus Christ.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.