

# *Our Lady of Lourdes*

Ash Wednesday

February 17, 2010

Readings:

Joel 2:12-18

2 Corinthians 5:20-6:2

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

Fr. Bob

Lent is a journey with Jesus toward Jerusalem, the city of his longing, the city of his dying, the city of his new birth. Lent looks to Easter. Whatever we do in Lent we do to get to that place of rebirth. We are heading for Easter and new life, and hope fulfilled. But we are not ready for Easter just yet. There is something we have to do before we can fully appreciate it.

From here to Holy Week it appears to be downhill all the way. This is the season of God's failure. Or rather, in human terms, what seems to be God's failure. For forty days we walk with God in the shadow of the death. Jesus comes with a word of life and comfort for the people but it is a word hard to hear and it echoes around but doesn't find a home. It is such an unpopular message that it gets him killed in the worst way—humiliated, betrayed, alone, and abandoned. Jesus failed.

Why was his word of peace and life and comfort so hard to hear? Why was John the Baptist so much more popular with his words of doom and death? Perhaps because we like to hang on to whatever little control we have. Half the people heard John preach and thought him a fool and went away untouched in their false self-confidence. The other half felt his words convict them of their faults, the failings, and gave them a way to take control of their own salvation by choosing to repent.

But Jesus came without condemnation. He didn't point the finger at sinners: he sat down to dinner with them. He didn't wait for anyone to come to perfection. Instead he made them friends and followers. The price for his friendship wasn't change or conversion or getting it right. There was no price. Friendship with Jesus came free ... and still does.

But at some point, he is also waiting for us to experience true conversion in our lives: To put aside those things that separate us from him. To put aside the pride of our own lives and to seek him with true humility. Today we mark ourselves with ash. And not just out of penance. It is a badge of friendship. Friendship with Jesus. And we can wear it with a sense of pride even though we know we haven't earned it. We are sinners. But Jesus hasn't yet demanded us to be totally perfect. Not YET. He has only asked that we be with him, walk with him, listen to him during this season and let conversion happen.

And this Lent, let us see ourselves, as imperfect as we are, as people who are at least willing to walk alongside of him to his destination. And as we walk with him, even though we are sinners, let us be open to the words he will speak to us.; let's walk with him so that when his word fails in the accounts we are given, that our reaction will be far different from the reactions of those who feared him, distrusted him and eventually put him to death.; let's stay with him, by his side, and let us stay with him so that at the end he will not be alone, and we will understand better and come to know more about how him and to know more, about the failure that turned into victory.