

Ash Wednesday

Sisters and Brothers in Christ, people of the church:

Today is Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent that ends Easter Sunday. For 11 months, we have lived with restrictions from the covid pandemic that must continue throughout Lent and Easter. These restrictions change how we experience Lent.

Our congregation is marking Ash Wednesday with this short reflection. Let's begin with a prayer from the Ash Wednesday BAS service:

*Dear friends in Christ,
every year, at the time of the Christian Passover, we celebrate our
redemption through the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

*Lent is a time to prepare for this celebration
and to renew our life in the paschal mystery.*

*We begin this holy season by remembering our need for repentance,
and for the mercy and forgiveness proclaimed in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.*

Reflect on: "Lent is a time to prepare for this celebration".

Imagine we invite family, friends and neighbours for a celebration at our home. At least in my house, there will be spiders' webs in corners and dust bunnies under furniture, and sometimes splotches from past mishaps. So, we clean, we organize, and then we celebrate.

It is the same in our spiritual selves. The cleaning and organizing begins "by remembering our need for repentance". There is some danger after 11 months of 'social distancing' that any focus on our sins might take us down a rabbit hole into depression. Remember always, love is greater than sin. Be a model of faith and community going forward, neither reckless nor isolated.

How do we do this? 'All roads lead to Rome'. What is best for one differs from what is best for another. Still, everyone travels more easily on a road than scrambling through the salal and blackberries. Our weekly service includes confession and absolution, but the pandemic and events have put important limitations on that road — we cannot physically gather and we have no priest.

Let me describe another road, from an organization that can form gently honest people — Alcoholics Anonymous. A link is on our website. Here are steps 3 to 12 of their 12 Step Program.

3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves. [*this requires great courage - but it is not enough*]
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to *our neighbours* and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

This is too much for me to do in 40 days. You too? AA has hope and comfort to offer newcomers [*my paraphrase*]:

- do not follow those steps you are unable to do, at this time;

We all can:

- keep an open mind; and
- stay in community; and
- continue to learn.

May each of us choose a road of repentance this unusual Lent, and may our road bless us, like a pilgrimage. As Pastor John said in Sunday's sermon, if I may paraphrase slightly:

- *the gift of faith lifts the veil that hangs over us,*
- *love changes us,*
- *we see what God has been working on in us,*
- *and we are sustained.*

May God bless you and keep you in these 40 days.