



# Ash Wednesday

The Divine Intervention

**March 1, 2017**

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## Scripture

### **Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18**

Jesus said to his disciples:

"Take care not to perform righteous deeds  
in order that people may see them;  
otherwise, you will have no recompense from your heavenly Father.

When you give alms,

do not blow a trumpet before you,

as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets  
to win the praise of others.

Amen, I say to you,

they have received their reward.

But when you give alms,

do not let your left hand know what your right is doing,  
so that your almsgiving may be secret.

And your Father who sees in secret will repay you.

"When you pray,  
do not be like the hypocrites,  
who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners  
so that others may see them.  
Amen, I say to you,  
they have received their reward.  
But when you pray, go to your inner room,  
close the door, and pray to your Father in secret.  
And your Father who sees in secret will repay you.  
"When you fast,  
do not look gloomy like the hypocrites.  
They neglect their appearance,  
so that they may appear to others to be fasting.  
Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward.  
But when you fast,  
anoint your head and wash your face,  
so that you may not appear to be fasting,  
except to your Father who is hidden.  
And your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you."

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## **Our Scripture Reflection**

Today we begin the most holy season of Lent. The Lenten season provides an opportunity for us to "Turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel." Our text describes the nature of true, faith filled change. Jesus warns His disciples against pious practices that are put on for public display rather than deep seated change. Those who choose to play a pious game are called "hypocrites", which in Greek means "stage actor." True conversion is the result of a thorough and honest effort of correcting sinful behavior. May Jesus give us all the Grace we need to do so.

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## **Food for your Journey**

Leo Tolstoy once wrote: "Truth, like gold, is to be obtained not by its growth, but by washing away from it all that is not gold." So, too, is inventory-taking -- spiritual or otherwise.

In trying to discern what is missing from their sales floor, store managers must first count every item still present on the shelves. Then, by process of elimination, they obtain their desired result.

The same is true of the inventory that is spiritual discernment -- which is similarly a process of elimination. The moral inventory we take at the start of Lent is not an exercise in self-shaming. It is, first, an exercise in commending ourselves for the disciplines we have been performing faithfully. It is only after these assets have been counted that we can discern the empty spots on the shelves of our lives -- and take steps to fill them.

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## **A Prayer from the Heart**

Jesus, Precious Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner. Amen.