



Growing Together in Christ

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LENTEN MESSAGE 2022

21 February 2022

TO: ALL MEMBERS OF THE ELCSA - CAPE ORANGE DIOCESE

RE: LENTEN MESSAGE 2022

Dear sisters and brothers

Be greeted with the doctrinal text of Ash Wednesday as recorded in Luke 11:28

"And Jesus said: Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it"

In the course of His public ministry Jesus revealed to His Apostles that **"the Son of man will be killed"** by the elders and the leaders of the Priestly order (Matthew 16: 21 -22) and then Peter took Him aside and rebuked Him. Jesus was mindful of the fact that His life – giving passion, death and subsequent resurrection was the fulfilment of God's will. It was part of God's plan of salvation for the whole of humanity (John 3: 16). Hence the period of LENT in the Church year.

Lent is a period that follows Epiphany and it precedes Easter. Lent is the fourth season of the Church year. We begin the Church year with Advent, then follow Christmas and then come Epiphany. In Latin this period is also known as **Quadragesima** = meaning 40 days of solemn religious observance. The number 40 has absolute theological significance. Moses stayed for 40 days on the mountain (Ex. 24:18) Elijah travelled for 40 days before he reached the cave where he had his vision (1 Kings 19:8) Nineveh as a city was given 40 days to repent and Israel of God travelled for 40 years in the wilderness before they could reach the "Promised land" of milk and honey – Canaan.

Lent begins on **Ash Wednesday** and ends with the **Holy Saturday** which is the day between Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

WHAT IS ASH WEDNESDAY?

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent. The administering of Ash on the forehead of every beloved Christian is a public symbol that we begin the season of penitence. This period is chiefly characterised by **Prayer, Fasting and almsgiving**. During this season of the Church year Christians are enjoined to "return to God" with our hearts (Joel 2:12) to allow God to cleanse us from all our unrighteousness and giving us an opportunity to surrender our all to God. The truth is there is no mention of Ash Wednesday in the Bible but there is a tradition of donning ashes as a sign of penitence that predates Jesus. There is no mention of Lent in the Bible either though many Christians see it as an imitation of the 40 days Jesus spends fasting and battling with Satan in the desert.

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In the Old Testament ashes were found to have been used for two purposes: as a sign of humility and morality; and as a sign of sorrow and repentance from sin. The Christian connotation for ashes in the liturgy of Ash Wednesday has also been taken from this Old Testament biblical custom. Receiving ashes on the forehead as the reminder of morality and a sign of sorrow for sin was a practice of the Anglo-Saxon Church in the 10th century. It was made universal throughout the Western church at the Synod of Benevento in 1091. Originally the use of ashes to be a token of penance was a matter of private devotion and it later became part of the official rite for reconciling public penitence. In this context, ashes on the penitent was served as a motive for fellow Christians to pray for the returning sinner and to feel sympathy for him/her. The use of ashes later passed into the present rite of beginning the penitential season of Lent on Ash Wednesday.

WHAT IS HOLY SATURDAY

The Saturday between Good Friday and Easter Sunday is often referred to as **Holy Saturday**. Holy Saturday is a Christian religious observance that ends the Lenten season. On this day Christians often organise a vigil to welcome in the season of Easter. The observance commemorates the final day of Jesus Christ's **death** which is often referred to as the triumphant descent into hell or Hades. The vigil begins just at the end of the Sabbath after 18h00 and it ends at 00h00 midnight. The vigil begins with a sombre mood but it ends with shouts of "victory slogans" like Hallelujah.

Lent is also a time that Christians use to strengthen their resolve and focus on three important aspects that Jesus taught about on the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter 6; namely **Prayer, Fasting and Alms giving**.

PRAYER

We live in a world that needs us to constantly stay on our knees – if not for ourselves; then it should be for others. God has established prayer as the means by which we receive His supernatural help. And without supernatural help, we cannot live a life worthy of the gospel. Everything that distinguishes Christians from the world in a Christ-exalting way is a work of God's supernatural grace. And God has ordained that His grace flows to us through prayer. That's why prayer must be central and not peripheral in our lives, in our relationships and in our ministry.

FASTING

Fasting in a religious sense usually includes, but not limited to:

- Abstain
- Refrain
- Deny self
- Be deprived of

The intention of fasting is always to empty oneself and to draw closer to God with minimal destruction. Fasting has to do with eliminating destructions of a spiritual nature. Fasting could also be used as an attempt to enlist God's help, for an example; when someone is sick (see Psalm 35:13) or when people want answers for something that is humanly inexplicable (see Jonah 3)

ALMSGIVING

Almsgiving is a Biblical notion of being charitable to those who are less fortunate than us. When exercised in honesty – almsgiving can be likened to when God gave His only begotten son, Jesus Christ, so that we who believe in Him should not perish – but have eternal life. Giving without expecting to get something in return. Remember that "blessed is the hand that gives than the one that receives".

Finally, It is my wish that as members of ELCSA – COD we could use this period of Lent 2022 to focus on these three elements of ancient spirituality. To ask God through Prayer to end these pandemics of Covid 19, abuse of women and children and femicide. That we could use this time to Fast and empty ourselves so that God can fill us with His righteousness and that we can Offer to God a good measure of our possessions so that others could find fulfilment.

I call you to experience Lent 2022 as a journey of conversion, prayer and sharing of our goods – so as to help ourselves and the communities we live in. To revive our faith in the living Christ and to live in constant hope of a new tomorrow. May the blessings of the Triune God accompany all of us in this journey towards the Light of Easter!

Shalom!!!

+ *Motsamai*

Motsamai

