

ASH WEDNESDAY

February 18, 2026



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Cover: Fourteenth Century Missal for Ash Wednesday (Italian, late 14c.) Graduals begin with the same Latin Introit, "Misereris omnium, Domine, et nihil odisti eorum..." (Thou hast mercy upon all, O Lord, and hast nothing...). The subject heading is "Scene, Liturgical: Distribution of Ashes".

Ash Wednesday

My dear Parishioners and Friends,

With the observance of Ash Wednesday, we have begun the liturgical Season of Lent. This is a time of prayer, penitence, sacrifice, conversion and charitable works. These forty days of Lent offer us an annual invitation to reflect on the Passion of the Lord as it relates to our own lives. As the Lord entered into the desert for forty days to prepare himself for his Passion and death out of mercy and love for us sinners, so we enter the dessert of our souls in this sacred time to imitate him, to draw closer to him, to walk with him, and so to receive his enormous graces of mercy, love, and compassion through prayer, fasting, and penitence and thereby participate even more joyfully in the glory of the Easter Resurrection.

Our divine Lord instructs us, "If anyone wishes to follow me, let him take up his cross and follow in my footsteps." So, in this way, we are taking up our own cross to follow the Lord as he bears his passionate love and mercy for us and for the whole world. As well, each one of us also helps others to carry their crosses. Consider the many people along the Way of the Cross on that Good Friday who assisted Jesus on the road to Calvary: the women of Jerusalem who offered Jesus comfort in his agony; Simon the Cyrene who was merely passing by but then assisted by taking the heavy burden of the cross off Jesus' shoulders; Veronica who wiped the sweat and blood from the Master's face; Joseph of Arimathea who donated his own tomb for Jesus' burial; and Mary and John who prayed at the foot of the cross. All these persons played a vital role in the Lord's Passion. Their charity is, without doubt, fondly remembered by the Lord. It is this charity of compassion for others which inspires us during Lent to greater depths of self-sacrifice in imitation of the Lord's infinite mercy and love for you and for me.

The expanded notes you find in this program which discuss the meaning and purpose of the Season of Lent are meant to assist you with *information* about Lent and hopefully offer you *formation* in your Lenten journey. Please take this program with you as you depart today as my gift.

As we enter in this holy Season and make this spiritual journey of prayer, fasting, and penitence together as one Church, my prayer is that these forty days of Lent will prepare us for the joys of Easter, with heart and mind renewed in the saving power of God through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Rev. Msgr. James D. Watkins, S.T.L., Ph.D.
Pastor

✠ The Season of Lent ✠

Introduction

One of the core beliefs of the Christian community is the unfathomable mercy and forgiveness which God grants in His redeeming love for the repentant sinner through His Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ. Even when we sin, the Lord invites us back to His loving embrace every time we turn back and seek His pardon. This theme dominates the Christian life of discipleship. In highlighted manner, Lent serves as a focused time to take seriously the spiritual care of our souls as an invitation to conversion and renewed faith in preparation for the glories of Easter.

An established principle of our liturgy is to gradually unfold this great mystery of faith in the ongoing spiritual redemption of our lives by means of thematic or doctrinal mysteries of the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord. Every Season throughout the liturgical year is a time of gradual unveiling, a kind of preparation for the next Season of grace and truth; each Season is linked to the next. In general, we observe this unfolding of the mysteries of our redemption in an excellent manner during the **four weeks of Advent**: In even clearer light the Church showed through successive weeks the coming of the Messiah, until he stood before us in royal splendor. Something similar occurs in the **forty days Lent**, the preparatory Season to the **fifty days of Easter**, the culmination of all the Seasons in the completion of the redemptive act of Christ for all humanity.

Now, in this particular Season of Lent, there are three levels, and each level has its own inner development:

The first level of Lent: ***A time of invitation***. The Church invites us to make good use of the great Season of Penance.

The second level of Lent: ***The Season of fasting and penance***. This is the Season of interior purification and spiritual renewal.

The third level of Lent: ***The memory of Christ's sufferings***. As early as the Monday after the Fourth Sunday of Lent (*Laetare Sunday*), the liturgy begins to speak of the sufferings of Jesus. With Passion Sunday, the liturgy abandons its reserve and openly shows us the Lord's passion.



Three Purposes of Lent

Given the central Lenten theme of spiritual conversion and renewal in light of God's infinite love and mercy, we now ask what is the particular purpose of this portion of the Church's liturgical year during Lent? What can it give us? It gives divine life, and in divine life we have the essence and the end of all Christian piety. Objectively, this new life was won by Christ through his bitter **Passion**; subjectively, it is now bestowed in **Baptism** and renewed in "second Baptism" or **Penance**. In briefest outline these are the high purposes of Lent.

Passion

First, let us speak of the purpose of Lent with regard to Christ's **Passion**. Already during the Christmas Octave and in the Sundays after Epiphany the Church introduced the passion motif somewhat, as we witness Christ's entering into conflict with the powers of darkness. During the first half of Lent, the interior aspect of the conflict is accentuated, while during the second half the motif of physical suffering comes into the foreground and reaches its climax in Holy Week.

Recall that in the Christmas cycle we were not merely interested spectators of the mighty struggle between light and darkness; then, as now, the mystery is re-enacted in each person's heart: in your soul Christ is

wrestling with the devil; or better, by the very fact that you are a member of the mystical Body of Christ, you are involved in this fight. At Easter we want to be ready to sing *Alleluia* with our victorious Savior, but the victory can only be gained by death and crucifixion of the natural man. Therefore, we must spiritually re-live our Savior's Passion in Lent; as catechumens, we must die with Christ; as penitents, we must die with Christ; as disciples, we must die spiritually with Christ in order to rise with him as new men and women on Easter Sunday. Christ's Passion, accordingly, is not merely the highest motive for a spiritual renewal; rather, it must be re-lived by us. We must share his sufferings and death.

Baptism

Second, let us speak of **Baptism** with regard to this Season of Lent. Lent is springtime in the liturgical year. From the planted and dying kernels of divine wheat will come a wonderful harvest - souls ripe for Baptism. Lent is the ideal Season to prepare for Baptism.

In the ancient Church Baptism was ordinarily administered to adults. After preliminary preparation that often extended over a period of years, select catechumens were numbered among those who desired Baptism and then, as postulants, given special instruction as they participated almost daily in the first part of the Mass. Furthermore, they undertook definite penitential exercises and were the object of repeated ecclesiastical exorcisms. The older Masses of Lent come from this time and frequently were designed with special reference to those preparing for Baptism. This fact easily explains the confident and at times joyous tone of the Masses; the Baptism motif often loses itself in the jubilant motif of Easter. Preparation for Baptism had indeed a serious side, for example, the death of the "old" man; it likewise had joyful aspects (e.g., the maternal pride of the Church, internal transfiguration, the coming Easter celebration).

For understanding the liturgy of the Season, the renewal of our Baptism is of great importance; not the sober and serious mood of penance, but a joyful anticipation of Baptism is the spirit proper to the older Lenten texts. In this sense, the focused priority on our Baptism is central to the Christian identity, and it is from Baptism that all the other Sacramental graces flow.

Penance

Third, let us speak of the so-called "second Baptism" - the Baptism of **penance**. Lent is the time *par excellence* for interior purification. In the early centuries sinners were obliged to do public penance during Lent; in a solemn penitential service they received the mourners' garb on Ash Wednesday and thereupon were excluded from community services until Holy Thursday. By way of exception, they were allowed to attend the Mass of the catechumens. This third and most recent motif in the Masses of Lent gradually found its way into the liturgy after the catechumenate had ceased to exist. Century by century, greater stress was placed on penance with the result that present-day Christians regard Lent simply as a time for special penitential practices.

Let us then see ourselves as true penitents; on Ash Wednesday let us receive the cross of ashes as a dedication to mortification and self-denial; let us try to submerge ourselves in the purifying stream of Lenten penance and to afford ourselves the graces of reconciliation with God in the Sacrament of Penance. The Collect (Opening Prayer) for Ash Wednesday indicates the spirit of our Lenten pilgrimage of faith: "*Lord, protect us in our struggle against evil. As we begin the discipline of Lent, make this day holy by our self-denial.*" Whatever our status, whether it be catechumen, penitent, or faithful member of the Church, we must never forget that the main task of the liturgy is not to impart instruction but to bestow divine life. Certainly, the Masses of Lent give us advice on spiritual renewal (after the manner of retreat conferences); but the purpose of our readings is less instruction than an experience of the power of grace. This is why the ancient Roman liturgy loved to portray the effect of the sacred mysteries in the Scriptural readings at Mass, choosing scenes from the Old and New Testament which typified the action of grace. The readings, indeed, the whole variable text of the Mass, were regarded as parables on the graces of redemption coming to the members of the Church from Christ's death on the Cross.

These graces are granted principally in **Baptism** and in the holy **Eucharist**, the two great well-springs of salvation. The first makes a beginning, the second brings growth and perfection; but both have essentially the same effect. On this account, not only the catechumen and the penitent, but also the believer, can observe

Lent fruitfully in essentially the same manner. Lent brings the graces of redemption to all; some receive incipient, germinal grace, while for others the grace of growth or perfecting grace. Still, to deepen our spiritual relationship with Christ in Baptism, the Sacrament of **Penance** (otherwise referred to as the Sacrament of Penance *and* Reconciliation) has the powerful effect of freeing us from the bonds of sin which frustrate our spiritual identity as children of God and thereby bring us back into right relationship with God, our neighbor and ourselves. For this reason, making use of the Sacrament of Penance through a “good Confession” during Lent has traditionally been an honored spiritual practice as part of the purifying penance necessary for an authentic communion with Christ from the very beginning of the Church. The Parable of the Prodigal Son highlights this essential point.

A typical example is the Gospel about the healing of the man who had been sick for thirty-eight years. Here the Sacraments of Baptism, Penance, and the Eucharist are represented in symbolic form. The catechumen is healed in the waters of Baptism, the penitent in the laver of penance, and the believer in the blood of Christ. Christ performs this miracle now during Lent on a higher level of reality by Baptism, Penance, and the Eucharist. Thus, the symbolic character of miracles in the Old and New Testaments is of great liturgical importance.

Lent, then, is the time of salvation *par excellence* not only for catechumens and penitents, but for the faithful as well. The catechumens attain their goal in Baptism on Holy Saturday at the Easter Vigil, while the penitents receive theirs in the reconciliation of Holy Thursday. Lent is designed to assist them in preparing. And through daily Mass the faithful have the divine life within them enriched and perfected. By Holy Thursday they should be free from all sin and cleansed of guilt so as to appear in full maturity and perfection of grace on Holy Saturday at the Easter Vigil.



The Ancient Stational Liturgy

A full appreciation of the Lenten liturgy is enriched by an acquaintance with the ancient stational observance. The reason we address this aspect of Lent here is to show the clear spiritual link each Christian has with the Successor of St. Peter upon whom our Lord established the Church, which affords all the graces of Word and Sacrament to us on our pilgrimage through life to heaven. Without Peter, there is no authentic Church of Jesus Christ in the world. For that reason, the stational churches in Rome invite us to participate in the spiritual bond we have with Peter, who today in the person of the Pope, represents the unbroken continuity of that expressed faith for over 2000 years. If we seek to be one with Christ during Lent and throughout our lives, we must also seek by God’s grace to be one with the Church in communion with Peter now, the Pope, and the bishops (Successors of the Apostles) in communion with him.

On set days the Christian community of Rome assembled in a designated church (*ecclesia collecta*) and then with the Pope passed in procession to another church, the station church (*statio*), which was dedicated to some illustrious saint. There the Eucharist was celebrated.

So vividly was the station saint before the minds of the assembled people that he seemed present in their very midst, spoke, and worshipped with them. Therefore, the older missal reads, “*Statio ad sanctum Paulum*,” that is, the service is not merely in the Church of St. Paul, but rather in (“*ad*” or “*at*”) his very presence. In the stational liturgy, then, St. Paul was considered as actually present and acting in his capacity as head and pattern for the worshipers. Yes, even more, the assembled congregation entered into a mystical union with the saint by sharing in his glory.

What special meaning, however, did the stational liturgy have during Lent? The ancient Roman Church desired to sanctify this important Season in the life of the mystical Body by daily Eucharistic worship. She wished to intensify the effect of this service by assembling the whole congregation, by the procession, by the stational church. Baptism, Penance, spiritual renewal - these were matters pertaining to the whole community.

Catechumens, penitents, and faithful should therefore pass together through the streets in song and prayer. The zeal of one should encourage the other; the fresh enthusiasm of the catechumen should edify all. Then also the place, the church of the stational saint, would have special elevating effect. His example, his words, his very person, stood vividly before the congregation. Such was the method of conversion employed by the ancient Church. Given the emphasis on Baptism and that renewal in the whole Season of Easter, the newly baptized of the Church (neophytes or “new born” or “reborn”) would wear their white baptismal garments (hence, the alb from “alba” meaning “white”) to the eucharistic Mass the Sunday after Easter (*Domenica in albis*), since the whole week of Easter Sunday to the following Sunday is an octave of immense praise and glory of God’s redemptive ministry for the entire Church.

Remember that in the ancient Church the Mass was not celebrated daily. In Lent, however, the Mass was offered almost every day. The presence of the Pope, the zeal of the catechumens and penitents, the gathering of many Christians from every quarter, a venerable church as the point of assembly, and the grave of an honored saint as the scene of the liturgy itself, the procession, the homily - none of these valuable psychological factors was overlooked. The station often influenced the choice of chants to such an extent that these texts can be understood only in the light of the stational context.

The word “station,” as noted earlier, seems to come from the Latin *statio (stare)*, that is standing together (*i.e.*, gathering around the bishop at the altar to celebrate the Eucharist). Before the end of the first century, the growth of the Christian community in the larger imperial centers (Rome, Antioch, Alexandria, *etc.*) required multiple eucharistic liturgies in different *domus dei* (churches in private homes - literally, “houses of God”), but the bishop’s eucharist remained the official liturgy.

At least during periods of relative calm, official stations were early designated for celebrating the major feast in various churches, so that as much of the community as possible might gather around the bishop regularly or at least from time to time.

After the Constantinian Peace of 313 AD, the primitive *domus dei* (which numbered 25 by the first century) became the *tituli* (“titles”) or parish churches. Eventually the Roman stations were reorganized and assigned to these *tituli*, plus the vast new Constantinian basilicas. The stations’ number and solemnity gradually increased, especially under the liturgical influence of Jerusalem. Significant additions were made to the list of stations by Pope Leo I (440-461), Pope Gregory I (590-604), and Pope Gregory II (715-731). The list was essentially completed by Pope Leo III (795-816) and comprehends 94 stations on 92 days, including the days of Lent and Easter Week.

Until the papacy moved to Avignon (1305), the stations were considered pontifical functions, a status they conserved only in principle after the return of the pope to Rome (1378). Interest in them revived in the nineteenth century, especially under the influence of Pope Leo XIII (1878-1903).

Note: These stations early took on a penitential character. Even to this day, many attend daily Mass at a set number of the Lenten Station Churches of Rome, a practice particularly evident by the English-speaking Christians in Rome who join the priests and seminarians of the Pontifical North American College for each day of Lent early in the morning, beginning with the Church of Santa Sabina on the Aventine Hill.

✚ Ash Wednesday ✚

The Beginning of Lent

“Behold, now is a very acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.” (2 Cor. 5)

Once again, the context for properly understanding the Season of Lent is the core belief in the infinite mercy and forgiveness which God grants in His redeeming love for the repentant sinner through His Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ. Even when we sin, the Lord invites us back to His loving embrace every time we turn back and seek His pardon. Among other parables our Lord uses to express this foundational truth, the Parable of the Prodigal Son captures this point poignantly. Lent serves as a focused time to take seriously the spiritual care of our souls as an invitation to conversion and renewed faith in preparation for the glories of Easter.

And so, we begin the Lenten pilgrimage of conversion and renewal today. The first four days of the forty days of Lent are of more recent origin, since the Season began on the following Sunday until the time of Pope Gregory I (590-604). The formularies for these days are highly didactic and there is a constant effort to instill the spirit of Christian fasting. The main thoughts are **fasting, prayer, and almsgiving**. These are the major external exercises of Lent.

The first of these days in Lent is Ash Wednesday --- the day of ashes! In ancient Rome the liturgy was celebrated at two distinct places: one, at the church of the entire assembly the blessing of the ashes marked the beginning of the penitential Season (Santa Anastasia); the other, where the Mass was offered in the station church (Santa Sabina).

The Blessing and Giving of Ashes

This ceremony in which we participate today is merely a relic of the solemn ritual formerly performed by the bishop with public penitents. Whoever had committed a grave, public sin was bound to submit to public penance at the beginning of Lent. Such was the custom from the fourth until the tenth century. This penance consisted primarily in exclusion from the community's Eucharistic services, but also included the practice of works of satisfaction, prayer, mortification, and fasting.

The rite of exclusion from Church functions began with penitents receiving the penitential garb in solemn ritual and having their heads strewn with ashes; then the bishop accompanied them to the gate of the church. This “expulsion” was a moving ceremony and served as a stern warning to all the faithful. As centuries passed, the Church mitigated her penitential discipline, and various penances were now assigned in secret. However, since the Middle Ages the faithful at large have voluntarily dedicated themselves to the practice of penance by receiving the blessed ashes. Nobles, kings, and emperors (for example, Charlemagne), joined the common throng and barefoot asked to be signed with the holy dust.

In Rome the blessing of ashes took place in the Basilica of Saint Anastasia (near the base of the Palatine Hill and the Circus Maximus). In this centrally located church were kept the crosses carried in the stational processions. As the clergy entered, an Introit psalm which gave the tone proper to the ceremony was sung.

The ashes are obtained by burning the palm branches (olive branches in other countries) blessed on the preceding Palm Sunday. On Ash Wednesday, the celebrant blesses the ashes, saying, *“Let us ask our Father to bless these ashes which we will use as the mark of our repentance.”* He then instructs the faithful to keep holy the Lenten Season in preparation for the joy of Easter. After sprinkling the ashes with holy water, the celebrant and ministers go to sign the foreheads of all with the blessed ashes as a mark of repentance.

As an outward sign of an interior grace, the sacramental of ashes symbolizes our conversion from sin to the life of grace. The Liturgy of the Word for Ash Wednesday points out this necessary conversion for the sake of our salvation. The first reading from the scripture today (Joel 2: 12-18) tells us of the Lord's firm desire that

our conversion from sin be entire: “*Return to me with your whole heart, with fasting, and weeping, and mourning; rend your hearts, not your garments, and return to the Lord, your God.*” As well, St. Paul’s Letter to the Corinthians puts its bluntly: “*We implore you in Christ’s name: be reconciled!*” (2 Cor. 5, 20-6, 2). In today’s gospel (Matthew 6, 1-6, 16-18) Jesus echoes that distinction made by the prophet Joel when he points out the dangers of the potential hypocrisy of outward show and inward conversion of the heart: “*Be on guard against performing religious acts for people to see.*”

Furthermore, Psalm 51 (the *miserere*) tells us how our own conscience convicts us: “*For I acknowledge my offense, and my offense is before me always.*” At the same time there is the assured hope that the Lord’s grace will enable me to make a new beginning: “*A clean heart create for me, O God, and a steadfast spirit renew within me.*”

During the distribution of ashes, the ministers sign the foreheads of the gathered assembly, saying, “*Remember, man, you are dust and to dust you will return,*” or “*Turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel.*” The choir chants a number of antiphons that are well suited to the spirit of the occasion.

✠ The Sacrament of Penance ✠

Introduction

The Mystery of Reconciliation in the History of Salvation

The Father has shown forth his mercy by reconciling the world to himself in Christ and by making peace for all things on earth and in heaven by the blood of Christ on the cross (See 2 Corinthians 5: 18ff; Colossians 18: 20). The Son of God made man living among men in order to free them from the slavery of sin (see John 8: 34-36) and to call them out of darkness into his wonderful light (1 Peter 2: 9). He therefore began his work on earth by preaching repentance and saying: “Turn away from sin and believe in the good news.” (Mark 1: 15). This invitation to repentance, which had often been sounded by the prophets, prepared of men for the coming of the Kingdom of God through the voice of John the Baptist who came “preaching a Baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Mark 1:4).

Jesus, however, not only exhorted men to repentance so that they should abandon their sins and turn wholeheartedly to the Lord (see Luke 15), but he also welcomed sinners and reconciled them with the Father (see Luke 5:20, 27-32; 7:48). Moreover, by healing the sick he signified his power to forgive sin. Finally, he himself died for our sins and rose again for our justification (see Romans 4:25). Therefore, on the night he was betrayed and began his saving passion he instituted the sacrifice of the new covenant in his blood for the forgiveness of sins (see Matthew 26:28). After his resurrection he sent the Holy Spirit upon the apostles, empowering them to forgive or retain sins (see John 20: 19-23) and sending them forth to all peoples to preach repentance and the forgiveness of sins in his name (see Luke 24:27).

The Lord said to Peter, “I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:19). In obedience to this command, on the day of Pentecost Peter preached the forgiveness of sins by Baptism: “*Repent and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins*” (Acts 2:38) (see Acts 3:19, 26; 17:30). Since then the Church has never failed to call men from sin to conversion and by the celebration of penance to show the victory of Christ over sin.

This victory is first brought to light in Baptism where our fallen nature is crucified with Christ so that the body of sin may be destroyed and we may no longer be slaves to sin but rise with Christ and live for God (see Romans 6:4-10). For this reason, the Church proclaims its faith in “the one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins.” In the sacrifice of the Mass the passion of Christ is made present; his body given for us and his blood shed for the forgiveness of sins are offered to God again by the Church for the salvation of the world. In the eucharist Christ is present and is offered as “the sacrifice which has made our peace” with God and in order that “we may be brought together in unity” by the Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, our Savior Jesus Christ, when he gave to his apostles and their successors power to forgive sins, instituted in his Church the Sacrament of Penance. Thus, the faithful who fall into sin after Baptism may be reconciled with God and renewed in grace. The Church “possesses both water and tears; the water of Baptism, the tears of penance.”

The Reconciliation of Penitents in the Church’s Life

The Church Is Holy but Always in Need of Purification

Christ “loved the Church and gave himself up for her to make her holy” (Ephesians 5:25-26), and he united the Church to himself as his bride. He filled her with divine gifts (see Ephesians 1:22-23), because she is his body and fullness, and through her he spreads truth and grace to all.

The members of the Church, however, are exposed to temptation and unfortunately often fall into sins. As a result, “while Christ, ‘holy, innocent, and unstained’ (Hebrews 7:26), did not know sin (see 2 Corinthians 5:21) but came only to atone for the sins of the people (see Hebrews 2:17), the Church, which includes within itself sinners and is at the same time holy and always in need of purification, constantly pursues repentance and renewal.”

The people of God (the Church) accomplishes and perfects this continual repentance in many different ways. It shares in the sufferings of Christ (see Peter 1:4:13) by enduring its own difficulties, carries out work of mercy and charity (see 1 Peter 4:8), and adopts ever more fully the outlook of the Gospel message. Thus, the people of God become in the world a sign of conversion to God. All the faithful confess that they are sinners and ask pardon of God and of their brothers and sisters. This happens in penitential services, in the proclamation of the word of God, in prayer, and in the penitential aspects of the eucharistic celebration.

In the Sacrament of Penance, the faithful “obtain from the mercy of God pardon for their sins against him; at the same time they are reconciled with the Church which they have wounded by their sins and which works for their conversion by charity, example, and prayer.”

Reconciliation with God and with the Church

Since every sin is an offense against God which disrupts our friendship with him, “the ultimate purpose of penance is that we should love God deeply and commit ourselves completely to him.” Therefore, the sinner who by the grace of a merciful God embraces the way of penance comes back to the Father who “first loved us” (1 John 4:19), to Christ who gave himself up for us (see Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 5:25), and to the Holy Spirit who has been poured out on us abundantly (see Titus 3:6).

“By the hidden and loving mystery of God’s design men are joined together in the bonds of supernatural solidarity, so much so that the sin of one harms the others just as the holiness of one benefits the others.” Penance always entails reconciliation with our brothers and sisters who are always harmed by our sins.

In fact, men frequently join together to commit injustice. It is thus only fitting that they should help each other in doing penance so that freed from sin by the grace of Christ they may work with all men of good will for justice and peace in the world.

The Sacrament of Penance and Its Parts

The follower of Christ who has sinned but who has been moved by the Holy Spirit to come to the Sacrament of Penance should above all be converted to God with his whole heart. This inner conversion of heart embraces sorrow for sin and the intent to lead a new life. It is expressed through confession made to the Church, due satisfaction, and amendment of life. God grants pardon for sin through the Church, which works by the ministry of priests.

a) *Contrition*

The most important act of the penitent is contrition, which is “heartfelt sorrow and aversion for the sin committed along with the intention of sinning no more.” “We can only approach the Kingdom of Christ by *metanoia*. This is a profound change of the whole person by which one begins to consider, judge, and arrange his life according to the holiness and love of God, made manifest in his Son in the last days and given to us in abundance” (see Hebrews 1:2; Colossians 1:19 and *passim*). The genuineness of penance depends on this heartfelt contrition. For conversion should affect a person from within so that it may progressively enlighten him and render him continually more like Christ.

b) *Confession*

The Sacrament of Penance includes the confession of sins, which comes from true knowledge of self before God and from contrition for those sins. However, this inner examination of heart and the exterior accusation should be made in the light of God’s mercy. Confession requires in the penitent the will to open his heart to the minister of God, and in the minister a spiritual a judgment by which, acting in the person of Christ, he pronounces his decision of forgiveness or retention of sins in accord with the power of the keys.

c) *Act of Penance (Satisfaction)*

True conversion is completed by acts of penance or satisfaction for the sins committed, by amendment of conduct and also by the reparation of injury. The kind and extent of the satisfaction should be suited to the personal condition of each penitent so that each one may restore the order which he disturbed and through the corresponding remedy be cured of the sickness from which he suffered. Therefore, it is necessary that the act of penance really be a remedy for sin and a help to renewal of life. Thus, the penitent, “forgetting the things which are behind him” (Philippians 3:13), again becomes part of the mystery of salvation and turns himself toward the future.

d) *Absolution*

Through the sign of absolution God grants pardon to the sinner who in sacramental confession manifests his change of heart to the Church’s minister, and thus the Sacrament of Penance is completed. In God’s design the humanity and loving kindness of our Savior here visibly appeared to us (see Titus 3:4-5), and God uses visible signs to give salvation and to renew the broken covenant.

In the Sacrament of Penance, the Father receives the repentant son who comes back to him, Christ places the lost sheep on his shoulders and brings it back to the sheepfold, and the Holy Spirit sanctifies this temple of God again or lives more fully within it. This is finally expressed in a renewed and even more fervent sharing of the Lord’s table, and there is great joy at the banquet of God’s Church over the son who has returned from afar (see Luke 15:7, 10, 32).

The Necessity and Benefit of the Sacrament

Just as the wound of sin is varied and multiple in the life of individuals and of the community, so too the healing which penance provides is varied. Those who by grave sin have withdrawn from the communion of love with God are called back in the Sacrament of Penance to the life they have lost. And those who through daily weakness fall into venial sins draw strength from a repeated celebration of Penance to gain the full freedom of the children of God.

-To obtain the saving remedy of the Sacrament of Penance, according to the plan of our merciful God, the faithful must confess to a priest each and every grave sin which they remember upon examination of their conscience.

-Moreover, frequent and careful celebration of this sacrament is also very useful as a remedy for venial sins. This is not a mere ritual repetition or psychological exercise, but a serious striving to perfect the grace of Baptism so that, as we bear in our body the death of Jesus Christ, his life may be seen in us ever more clearly (see 2 Corinthians 4:10). In confession of this kind, penitents who accuse themselves of venial faults should

try to conform more closely to Christ and to follow the voice of the Spirit more attentively. In order that this sacrament of healing may truly achieve its purpose among Christ's faithful, it must take root in their own lives and move them to more fervent service of God and neighbor.

The celebration of this sacrament is thus always an act in which the Church proclaims its faith, gives thanks to God for the freedom with which Christ has made us free (see Galatians 4:31), and offers its life as a spiritual sacrifice in praise of God's glory, as it hastens to meet the Lord Jesus.

Conclusion

As one liturgical Season unfolds to the next, only to return full cycle to its origin, so we conclude where we began these reflections. One of the essential truths of our Christian Faith is the incredibly rich mercy and forgiveness which our Lord and Savior extends through His Church to the repentant sinner who seeks reconciliation with Him. Even when we sin, the Lord invites us back to His loving embrace every time we turn back and seek His pardon. This theme dominates the Christian life of discipleship. In highlighted manner, Lent serves as a focused time to take seriously the spiritual care of our souls as an invitation to conversion and renewed faith in preparation for the glories of Easter.

✚ Lenten Regulations ✚

Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are days of fast and abstinence.

All Catholics who have reached their 18th birthday and are less than 60 years of age are bound to observe the fast, by which they are limited to a single full meal during the course of the day.

All Catholics who have reached their 14th birthday are bound to observe the days of abstinence during which no meat may be eaten.

Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, and all Fridays of Lent are days of abstinence.

Since every Sunday is the day of the Lord's Resurrection and a cause for rejoicing, one is not bound to the Lenten regulations on Sundays in Lent.



INTRODUCTORY RITES

PROCESSIONAL HYMN

God of Mercy and Compassion

Edmund Vaughn
(1827 - 1908)

1. God of mercy and compassion, look with
2. By my sins I have deserved, death and
3. By my sins I have a - ban - don'd right and
4. See our Sav - ior, bleed - ing, dy - ing, on the

pi - ty - up - on me, Fa - ther let me call Thee
end - less mi - se - ry. Hell with all it's pains and
claim to - heav'n a - bove. Where the saints re - joice for -
cross of - Cal - va - ry; To that cross my sins have

Fa - ther, 'Tis thy child re - turns to Thee.
tor - ments, and for all e - ter - ni - ty.
ev - er, in a bound - less - sea of love.
nail'd - him, yet He bleeds and - dies for me.

Je - sus Lord, I ask for mer - cy; Let me

not im - plore in vain; - - All my sins, I now de -
test - them, ne - ver will, I - sin a - gain.

GREETING

COLLECT

LITURGY OF THE WORD

FIRST READING

Joel 2:12-18

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Joel

Even now, says the LORD,
return to me with your whole heart,
with fasting, and weeping, and mourning;
Rend your hearts, not your garments,
and return to the LORD, your God.
For gracious and merciful is he,
slow to anger, rich in kindness,
and relenting in punishment.
Perhaps he will again relent
and leave behind him a blessing,
Offerings and libations
for the LORD, your God.

Blow the trumpet in Zion!
proclaim a fast,
call an assembly
Gather the people,
notify the congregation;
Assemble the elders,
gather the children
and the infants at the breast;
Let the bridegroom quit his room
and the bride her chamber.
Between the porch and the altar
let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep,
And say, “Spare, O LORD, your people,
and make not your heritage a reproach,
with the nations ruling over them!
Why should they say among the peoples,
‘Where is their God?’”

Then the LORD was stirred to concern for his land
and took pity on his people.

The Word of the Lord. **R/. Thanks be to God.**

RESPONSORIAL PSALM

W. Clifford Petty
Psalm 51:3-4, 5-6ab, 12-13, 14 and 17

Have mer-cy on us, O God have mer-cy on us O
God have mer-cy on us O God, for we have sinned.

Have mercy, tender God,
forget that I defied you
wash away my sin,
cleanse me from my guilt. **R/.**

Creator, reshape my heart,
God, steady my spirit
Do not cast me aside,
stripped of your holy spirit. **R/.**

I know my evil well,
it stares me in the face
evil done to you alone
before your very eyes. **R/.**

Save me, bring back my joy,
support me, strengthen my will.
Lord, give me words,
and I will shout your praise. **R/.**

SECOND READING

2 Corinthians 5:20-6:2

A reading from the second Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians

Brothers and sisters: We are ambassadors for Christ,
as if God were appealing through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ,
be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who did not know sin,
so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

Working together, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain.
For he says:

*In an acceptable time I heard you,
and on the day of salvation I helped you.*

Behold, now is a very acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

The Word of the Lord. **R/.** **Thanks be to God.**

ACCLAMATION BEFORE THE GOSPEL
Mass of the Angels and Saints, Steven R. Janco



Glo - ry and praise to - you, Lord - Je - sus Christ!

If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts. R/.

GOSPEL

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

The Lord be with you. **R/. And with your spirit.**

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew **R/. Glory to you, O Lord.**

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.”

The Gospel of the Lord. **R/. Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

HOMILY

DISTRIBUTION OF ASHES

Troisième Leçon de Ténèbres

Deborah Sternberg, *Soprano*, Grace Gori, *Mezzo-soprano*

François Couperin
(1663 - 1733)

Jod. Manum suam misit hostis ad omnia
desiderabilia ejus; quia vidi gentes ingressas
sanctuarium suum, de quibus paeceperas,
ne intrarent in Ecclesiam tuam.

Capb. Omnis populus ejus gemens, et
quaerens panem, dederunt pretiosa quaeque
procibo, ad refocillandam animam. Vide,
Domine, et considera quoniam facta sum vilis.

Lamed. O vos omnes, qui transitis per
viam, attendite, et videte si est dolor sicut
dolor meus; quoniam vindemiavit me, ut
locutus est Dominus in die irae furoris sui.

Mem. De excelso misit ignem in ossibus
meis, et eruditivit me: Expandit rete pedibus
meis, convertit me retrorsum: posuit me
desolatum, tota die moerore confectam.

Nun. Vigilavit jugum iniquitatum mearum
in manu ejus; convolutae sunt, et impositae
collo meo; infirmata est virtus mea:
dedit me Dominus in manu, de qua non
potero surgere.

Jerusalem, convertere ad Dominum Deum
tuum.

The adversary hath spread out his hand
upon all her pleasant things: for she hath
seen that the heathen entered into her
sanctuary, whom thou didst command that
they should not enter into thy
congregation.

All her people sigh, they seek bread; they
have given their pleasant things for meat to
relieve the soul: see, O Lord, and consider;
for I am made vile.

Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?
Behold and see if there be any sorrow like
unto my sorrow, which is done unto me,
wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in
the day of His fierce anger.

From above hath He sent fire into my
bones, and it prevaleth against them: He
hath spread a net for my feet. He hath
turned me back. He hath made me desolate
and faint all day.

The yoke of my transgressions is bound
by His hand: they are wreathed, and come
up upon my neck: He hath made my
strength to all, the Lord hath delivered me
into their hands, from whom I am not able
to rise up.

Jerusalem, return thee to the Lord, thy
God.

UNIVERSAL PRAYER

R/. Lord, hear our prayer.

LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

Music during the Preparation of the Altar & Offerings

Our Father We Have Wandered

Johann Sebastian Bach
(1685 - 1750)

1. Our Fa - ther, we have wan - dered And
2. And now at length dis - cern - ing The
3. O Lord of all the - liv ing, Both -

hid - den from your face; In fool - ish ness have
e - vil that we do, Be - hold us, Lord, re -
ban ished and - re stored, - Com - pas - sion ate, - for -

squan - dered your leg - a - cy of grace. But
turn - ing with hope and trust to you. In
give - ing, and - ev er - car - ing Lord. Grant

now, in ex - ile dwell - ing, We
haste you come to meet us, And
now that our trans - gress ing, Our -

rise with fear and shame, as dis - tant but com -
home re - joic - ing bring, in glad - ness there to
faith - less ness may cease. Stretch out your hand in -

pell - ing, we hear you call our name.
greet - us, with calf and robe and ring.
bless - ing, in - par don, and in peace.

Words: Kevin Nichols (1929-2006).

Music: *Herzlich tut mich verlagen*, Hans Leo Hassler (1564-1612).
Adpt. and harm. Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750).

PASSION CHORALE

PREFACE ACCLAMATION

Mass of Resurrection, Stephen R. Janco

Cantor and assembly

Ho - ly, Ho - ly, Ho - ly Lord God of hosts,
 Hea'vn and earth are full of your glo - ry. Ho -
 san - na, ho - san - na, ho san - na in - the high - est.
 Bless-ed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Ho -
 san - na, ho - san - na, ho san - na in the high - est.

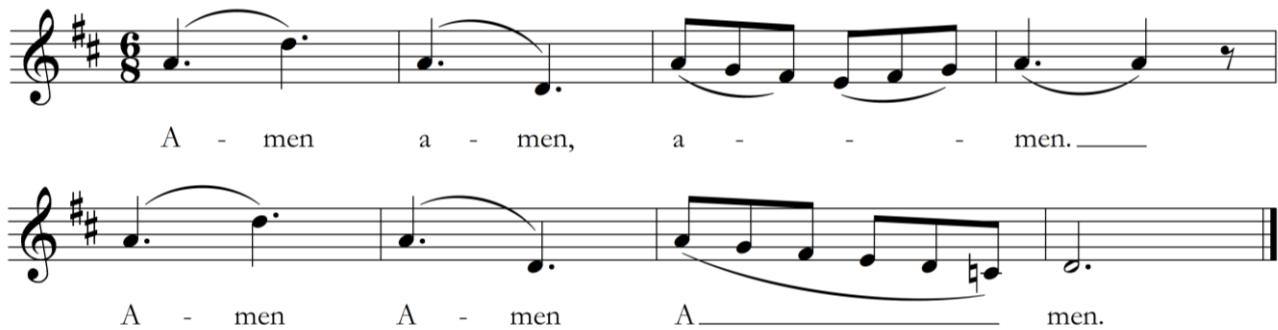
MEMORIAL ACCLAMATION

Mass of Resurrection, Stephen R. Janco

We pro - claim your Death O Lord, and pro - fess your
 Re - sur - rec - tion un - - til you come a - gain.

GREAT AMEN

Mass of Resurrection, Stephen R. Janco



A - men a - men, a - - - men. —

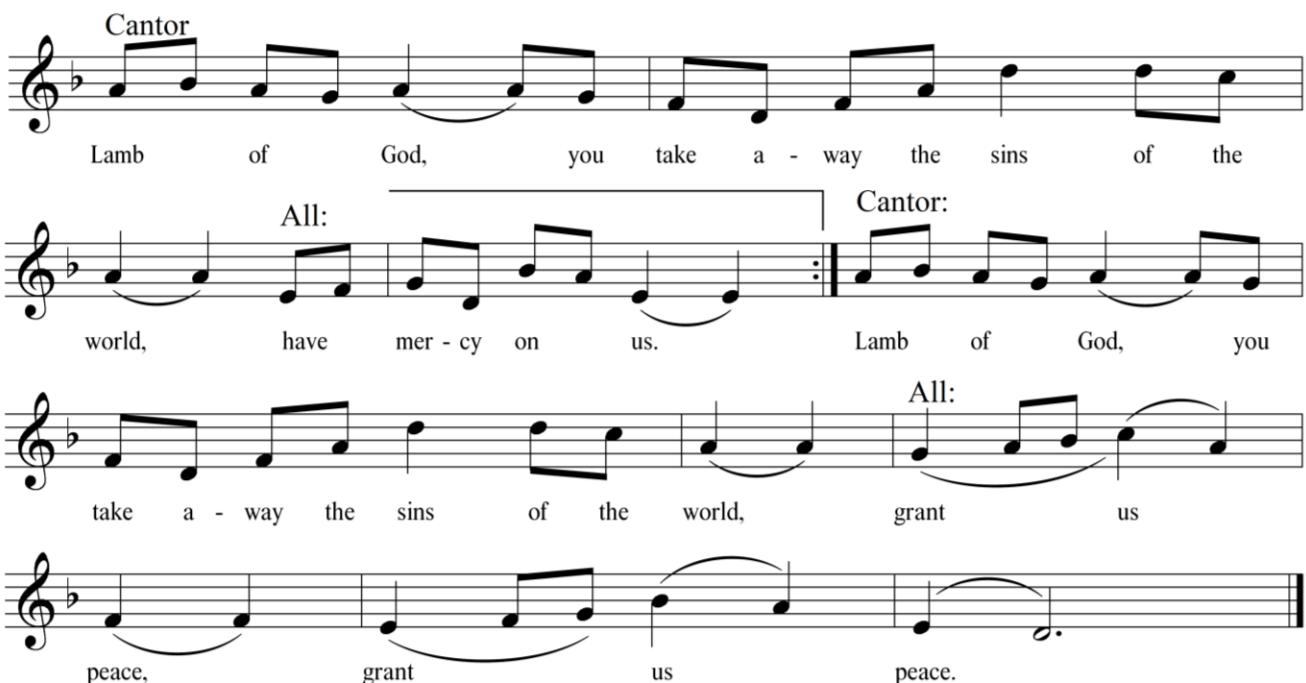
A - men A - men A — men.

COMMUNION RITE

LORD'S PRAYER

LAMB OF GOD

Mass, Peter Fay



Cantor

Lamb of God, you take a - way the sins of the

All: Cantor:

world, have mer - cy on us. Lamb of God, you

All:

take a - way the sins of the world, grant us

peace, grant us peace.

SIGN OF PEACE

MUSIC AT HOLY COMMUNION

Stabat Mater (Movements 1, 3 & 12)

Deborah Sternberg, *Soprano*, Grace Gori, *Mezzo-soprano*

Giovanni Battista Pergolesi

(1710 - 1736)

I. Stabat Mater Dolorosa Juxta Crucem

Stabat mater dolorosa juxta crucem, in qua pendebat Filius. Stabat mater dolorosa juxta crucem flens, dum in ea Filium suum pependit. Mater tristis stabat plena lacrimis in cruce dum Filius ibi pendens. Stabat mater dolorum lacrimans juxta crucem, in qua pendebat Filius. Flens stabat Mater dolorum iuxta crucem, dum pendebat Filius. Mater stabat maerens per crucem flens dum Filius ibi pependit. Stabat mater dolorosa ante crucem, ubi pependit Filium ad stationem crucis. Stabat mater flebilis flens, Jesu proxima usque ad ultima.

The grieving Mother stood weeping beside the cross where her Son was hanging.

The Mother stood grieving beside the cross weeping while on it hung her Son.

The sorrowful Mother stood full of tears by the Cross while her Son was hanging there.

The Mother of sorrows stood in tears beside the cross on which her Son was hanging.

Weeping stood the Mother of Sorrows next to the Cross while her Son hung there.

The Mother stood sorrowing by the cross weeping while her Son hung there.

The sorrowful Mother stood weeping before the cross where hung her Son.

At the cross her station keeping, stood the mournful Mother weeping, close to Jesus to the last.

III. O quam tristis et afflita fuit illa benedicta Mater Unigeniti

O quam tristis et afflita illa unigeniti Mater beata! Quam tristis et quam afflita fuit illa beata Mater unius Filii!

O quam tristis et afflita fuit illa benedicta Mater Unigeniti sui! O beata moerens Mater, beata virgo, Mater omnium sanctorum O quam tristis et afflita Mater illa beatissima, Unigeniti!

O how sad and afflicted was that blessed Mother of the Only-begotten!

How sad and how afflicted was that blessed Mother of single Son.

O how sad and afflicted was that blessed Mother of her Only-begotten Son.

O, that blessed one, grief-laden, blessed Mother, blessed maiden, Mother of the all-holy One!

Oh how sad and sore distressed was that mother highly blessed, of the sole-begotten One!

XII. Quando Corpus Morietur fac ut Animae Donetur Paradisi Gloria. Amen.

Quando corpus morietur fac ut animae donetur paradisi gloria. Amen. Quando corpus morietur, fac ut animae donetur paradisi gloria. Amen. Quando corpus morietur, anima detur gloria paradisi. Amen. Cum moritur corpus meum, capiat anima mea gloriam caeli. Amen. Quando corpus morietur, anima detur gloria Paradisi. Amen. Quando corpus meum morietur, fac ut detur mihi gloria in paradiso spiritus. Amen. Cum in morte hoc corpus jacet, tunc anima mea digna est in suo paradiso ad resurgendum gloriari dum corpus meum hic cubet, ad tui gloriosum paradisum velociter volat anima mea. Amen. Dum hic defluit corpus, laudet anima tua bonitatem, secura in paradiso tecum. Amen. Quando redit pulvis meus in pulverem, da animam, ut ad te suspiret, in paradiso tuo locum. Amen.

When my body dies, grant that to my soul is given the glory of paradise. Amen.

When my body dies, may my soul be granted the glory of paradise. Amen.

When my body dies, let my soul receive the glory of heaven. Amen.

When my body dies, let my soul be given the glory of paradise. Amen.

When my body shall die, grant that my spirit will be given glory in paradise. Amen.
When in death this body lies, then fit my soul on high to rise to glory in His Paradise. Amen.
While my body here is lying, let my soul be swiftly flying to Thy glorious Paradise. Amen.
While my body here decays, may my soul Thy goodness praise, safe in Paradise with Thee. Amen.
When to dust my dust returns, Grant a soul, that to You yearns, In Your paradise a place. Amen.



Guidelines for the Reception of Holy Communion

FOR CATHOLICS

As Catholics, we fully participate in the celebration of the eucharist when we receive holy communion. We are encouraged to receive communion devoutly and frequently. In order to be properly disposed to receive communion, participants should not be conscious of grave sin and normally should have fasted for one hour. A person who is conscious of grave sin is not to receive the Body and Blood of the Lord without prior sacramental confession except for a grave reason where there is no opportunity for confession. In this case, the person is to be mindful of the obligation to make an act of perfect contrition, including the intention of confessing as soon as possible (CODE OF CANON LAW, CANON 916). A frequent reception of the Sacrament of Penance is encouraged for all.

FOR FELLOW CHRISTIANS

We welcome our fellow Christians to this celebration of the eucharist as our brothers and sisters. We pray that our common baptism and the action of the Holy Spirit in this eucharist will draw us closer to one another and begin to dispel the sad divisions that separate us. We pray that these will lessen and finally disappear, in keeping with Christ's prayer for us "that we may all be one" (JOHN 17:21).

Because Catholics believe that the celebration of the eucharist is a sign of reality of the oneness of faith, life and worship, members of those churches with whom we are not yet fully united are ordinarily not admitted to holy communion. Eucharistic sharing in exceptional circumstances by other Christians requires permission according to the directives of the diocesan bishop and the provisions of canon law (CANON 844 §4). Members of the Orthodox Churches, the Assyrian Church of the East, and the Polish National Catholic Church are urged to respect the discipline of their own churches. According to Roman Catholic discipline, the Code of Canon Law does not object to the reception of communion by Christians of these churches (Canon 844 §3).

FOR THOSE NOT RECEIVING HOLY COMMUNION

All who are not receiving holy communion are encouraged to express in their hearts a prayerful desire for unity with the Lord Jesus and with one another.

FOR NON-CHRISTIANS

We also welcome to this celebration those who do not share our faith in Jesus Christ. While we cannot admit them to holy communion, we ask them to offer their prayers for the peace and the unity of the human family.

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POST-COMMUNION MEDITATION

Softly and Tenderly, Jesus Is Calling

Will Thompson

(1847 - 1909)

1. Soft - ly and ten - der - ly Je - sus is call - ing,
 2. Why should we tar - ry when Je - sus is plead - ing,
 3. Time is now fleet - ing, the mo - ments are pass - ing
 4. O for the won - der - ful love He has prom - ised,
 call - ing for you and for me; See, on the
 plead - ing for you and for me? Why should we
 pass - ing from you and from me; Shad - ows are
 prom - ised for you and for me; Though we have
 por - tals He's wait - ing and watch - ing, watch - ing for
 lin - ger and heed not His mer - cies, mer - cies for
 gath - er - ing death - beds are com - ing, com - ing for
 sinned He has mer - cy and par - don, par - don for
 you and for me. Come home, come home -
 you and for me.
 you and for me.
 you and for me.
 Ye who are weary come home; ear - nest-ly ten - der - ly
 Je - sus is call - ing, Call - ing, "O sin - ner, come home!"

Will Thompson (1847-1909).

THOMPSON
11.7.11.7 with Refrain

PRAYER OVER THE PEOPLE

BLESSING AND DISMISSAL

RECESSATIONAL HYMN

The Glory of These Forty Days

1. The glo - ry of - these for - ty days We
2. A lone and fast - ting Mo - ses saw The
3. So Dan - iel trained his mys - tic sight, De -
4. Then grant that we like them be true, Con -

cel - e - brate with songs of praise; For Christ, by whom all
lov - ing God who gave the law; And to E - li - jah,
liv - ered from the li - on's might; And John, the Bride-groom's
sumed in fast and prayer with you; Our spir - its strength-en

things were made, Him - self has fast - ed and has prayed.
fast - ing came, the steeds and char - i - ots of flame.
friend be - came, the her - ald of Mes - si - ah's name.
with your grace, and give us joy to see your face.

Gregory the Great (540-604).
Trans. Maurice F. Bell, 1906.

Klug's *Geistliche Lieder*, 1543.
Harm. Johann Sebastian Bach, 1725.

Music Acknowledgments:

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Join us during Lent and Holy Week

Confessions during Lent on Wednesdays from 7:00pm to 8:00pm

Stations of the Cross on Fridays during Lent at 11:30am and 7:00pm

Daily Mass at 12:00 noon

Holy Week Schedule

Palm Sunday

5:00pm Vigil Mass on Saturday

Sunday Masses at 7:30am, 11:00am (Choir), 7:00pm

Holy Thursday

Mass of the Lord's Supper at 7:00pm (Choir)

No 12:00pm noon Mass today

Good Friday

Liturgy of the Passion of the Lord

at 12:00pm noon (Cantor, Organ & Cello)

Stations of the Cross at 3:00pm

Holy Saturday

The Easter Vigil at 7:00pm (Choir)

No 4:00pm Confessions nor 5:00pm Mass today

Easter Sunday

Masses at 7:30am,

11:00am (Brass, & Choir), 7:00pm

For more information, visit our website at

stanndc.org

**CHURCH OF SAINT ANN
2025-2026 CONCERT SERIES**

Sunday, March 8, 2026

3:00pm

Dominic Fiacco

Organist – St. John the Divine, NYC

Sunday, March 22, 2026

3:00pm

“Cello Gang”

Mount Vernon Virtuosi

Amit Peled, conductor

Sunday, April 19, 2026

3:00pm

“From Moscow through Paris to
New York on two Pianos”

Nikita Fitenko, Katerina Zaitseva, Pianists

Sunday, April 26, 2026

3:00pm

Fundraiser for Musical Artists in Need

Members of the Washington National Opera Chorus

Steven Gathman, conductor

Sunday, May 31, 2026

3:00pm

Washington Men’s Camerata

Scott Tucker, artistic Director

Sunday, June 7, 2026

“From Past to the Future”

Alexander Fiterstein, Clarinet

Amit Peled, Cello

Martin Labazavitch, Piano

Sunday, June 14, 2026

Alcee Chriss, Organist

Trinity Wall Street, NYC

Enjoy snippets of our past recitals on our website.

Check our website for our excellent concert series for the next program year 2026-2027 which begins in September of this year, featuring great pianists, organists, and choral ensembles.

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