

REFLECTION: Lent is a time for change. A time when we look closely at our life and choose the things that give us life rather than the things that destroy us. What are the things that I want to change in my life over the next 40 days? Jesus, during Lent, I promise to...

Ash Wednesday

February 18, 2026

INTRODUCTION

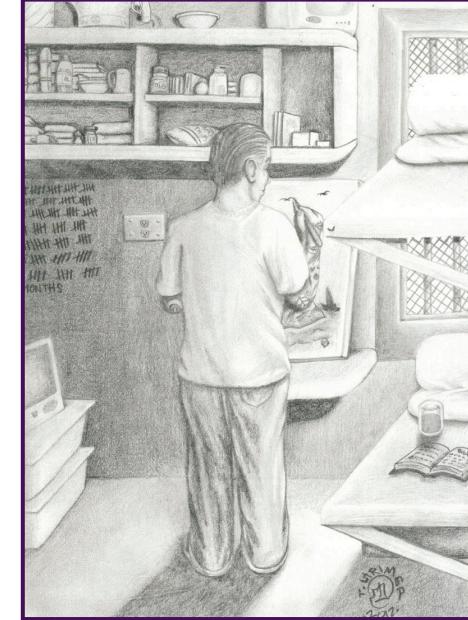
Today Lent begins, the time to put off our masks and to turn our face and heart to God and to people. In this holy season, we reflect on the true meaning of our lives. Who am I and what am I living for? Am I living for God and the community? We shall be invited to receive ashes on our foreheads with the invitation, "Turn away from sin and be faithful to the gospel." Away, then, with all masks and return to God, to your true self and to one another as God's people.

OPENING PRAYER

Let us pray together:

LORD,

As we enter the Lenten Season, help us change the things in our life that lead us to death and darkness. Help us see your light through those around us and forgive those who have hurt us.



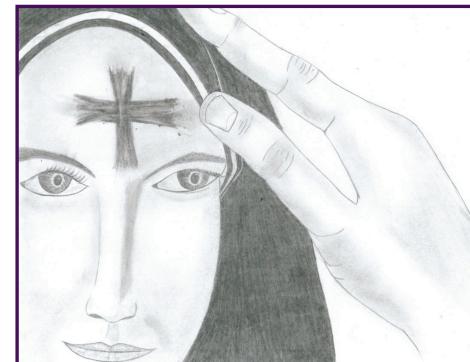
"Marking the days of Lent"
by T. Larimer.

We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

WISDOM FROM THE CELLS

I remember when I decided to change my path. I grew tired of my old criminal beliefs and chose to change. I prayed to our Lord and asked Him to help me. The help came, but it was a slow transformation period. It came in the form of people (other inmates) who were well ahead in self-help rehabilitation and cognitive growth. In every opportunity I was given, I always knew it was the Lord who sent each and every one of them to help me walk a different path. I kept my faith in Him and knew the Lord was with me. I began going to church and attending the JRJI retreats and programs. I found a lot of peace and wisdom during our meditations. Transformation has been a long process, but it has happened faster than it took for evil to erode my life for twenty-four years. In three years, the Lord has worked on me and it is shining forth as a new creation that He has fashioned for the whole world to see and know. If He can change me, He can change anybody. I remember when the Lord became my advocate, I decided to change my path.

- Ruhani, who is in a California State Prison.



"Ash Wednesday" by José
who is in juvenile hall.

BLESSING OF THE ASHES

The ashes used today come from the branches blessed last year for Palm Sunday -- palms that were waved in victory and praise.

LORD,

Bless these ashes by which we show that we are dust. Pardon our sins and keep us faithful to the journey of Lent.

Let this sign that we place on our foreheads open our hearts and heal our broken relationships. Amen.

CLOSING PRAYER

Let us pray together:

LORD,

Change is hard.

Give us the courage and strength to resist temptation as we walk with you during the next forty days.

We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.



LITURGY OF THE WORD

First Reading: Joel 2:12-18

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: Psalm 51:3-4, 5-6ab, 12-13

R. Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.

Have mercy on me, O God, in your goodness; in the greatness of your compassion wipe out my offense.

Thoroughly wash me from my guilt and of my sin cleanse me.

R. Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.

For I acknowledge my offense, and my sin is before me always:

"Against you only have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight."

R. Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.

A clean heart create for me, O God, and a steadfast spirit renew within me.

Cast me not out from your presence, and your Holy Spirit take not from me.

R. Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.

Gospel: 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."

The Gospel of the Lord.

R. Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

MEDITATION: CHANGE

(From the eyes of Peter)

it was a hot day sweat was pouring down my face so many people had traveled to the flowing river the jordan was ready to receive so many

i was watching so many people waiting to enter the water looking at what happens when the people leave the water was does it mean to be transformed to change?

i was listening to what john was saying to the crowds: if you use violence in words or in acts change

some will go home transformed while others will remain the same what is it that makes us change?

do we decide to change with the mind? do we one day wake up and change?

is it when we see what we have done by our actions? is it when we have nowhere else to turn? john continued to speak to the crowds: change your ways look at your life how do you need to change?

do not change for one day because you are suffering change your ways

jesus was showing me a young girl who was walking alone to the river all her life she had been abused and suffered greatly for a long time but one day she was walking under the stars late at night and a presence overtook her she knew she was in the presence of god her whole being felt this

the following week she began to open up her heart to pray deeply

today she is walking to the river to tell god that she really wants to change change really has

something to do with a relationship with the connection and love that is birthed from the relationship this is what lets us change

listening to john again: open your hearts do not be afraid if you are attached to any darkness let go change your behavior if you are not walking in the light change your ways

listening to john's voice getting louder: don't sell your souls be careful with who you are following do not be slaves to darkness you need to be freed it will not be easy

seeing this from the hillside i watched the girl jesus pointed out to me i could hear her saying jesus

i will change i will no longer dedicate my life to acts of death for revenge and hate i choose life and she walked to the middle of the river where john immersed her when she emerged her face was radiant

she had made the decision to change never again would she return to her old ways with this attitude she could find real genuine love in her life

and i too was ready to free myself of ways of darkness after that afternoon being with jesus and listening to john talk about change i needed to stop judging others by race by the color of their skin i do not want to make fun of another person

i realized we are equally loved by our god how wrong it is to look down on another because of their race or class i realized how i needed to never again be violent against others

i know that by having this relationship with jesus it was giving me the strength to change at my deepest center