



Weekly Message from Fr. Rex
Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time
February 14, 2021

Dear Ascension Parish Family,

We begin Lent this Wednesday. On Wednesday we will hear those words again: “*You are dust and unto dust you shall return*” or “*Repent and believe in the gospel.*” They are both haunting and inviting. They make us uncomfortable and hopeful. Every year on Ash Wednesday, we embark on a journey. We know where it takes us. Our Lenten journey takes us toward the cross and toward the tomb and toward the unending joy of those who found the tomb empty. As one biblical scholar put it, Lent is a journey ‘*from ashes to fire.*’ Lent begins with ashes on Ash Wednesday and closes with fire at the Easter Vigil.

Every Lenten season calls us to a change of heart. It speaks of our need to die to our *old selves and be born anew*. Lent then is a birthing process. One of my favorite images that describes this process of dying and rising comes from the ancient Greek mythology. It speaks about a fire bird known as the *phoenix*. It is said to have a life cycle of 500 – 1000 years at the end of which it builds a nest of twigs which then ignites. Both the bird and the nest burn fiercely and are reduced to ashes. Then from the ashes rises a new, young and vibrant phoenix to live again. The new phoenix is destined to live as old as its old self. Perhaps, that is a good description of what needs to happen inside of us as we make this journey from ashes to fire.

However, what is equally important is how we get there and what happens along the way. As we travel along, Lent affords us the grace and the opportunity to rewrite our stories. Yet before we rewrite our stories, we need to take a look at the old ones. As we revisit our old stories especially in the backdrop of a pandemic, which might be hard and painful, Lent invites us to embrace our imperfections and brokenness and those of others. Learning to accept our messiness and each other’s, and choosing to celebrate our differences is an important key to bringing about healing and closure to some of our incomplete stories. This journey of forty days invites us to take the good, the bad and the ugly parts of our lives and lay them at the feet of the Lord who makes all things new, so we can become the people God wants us to be.

The great pillars of Lent are *fasting, prayer and almsgiving*. Whatever it is we choose to fast from, however much time we spend in prayer and whatever it is we choose to give, let us start small and be faithful in our Lenten observances. Lent is not just a private exercise, but a public observance of the whole church. As one spiritual writer puts it: “*Lent is the great annual retreat of the Church, the people of God, reminding ourselves of the dignity and obligations that are ours because we are baptized.*” This is why we all leave the church with ashes. From ashes to fire....it is our journey, the journey of life.

Blessed and holy Lent.

Fr. Rex