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**MARCH 1, 2017**  
**ASH WEDNESDAY**  
**SIMONE CAMPBELL, SSS**

Hi, I'm Sister Simone Campbell, and I'm the Executive Director of NETWORK, a national Catholic social justice lobby here in Washington D.C. and I want to share with you about Ash Wednesday.

I've always been puzzled about why we wear ashes on our forehead on Ash Wednesday. When the Gospel reading for today clearly says, "When you fast do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, they neglect their appearance," and then the Gospel says, "No, we should dress up, we should anoint our head, we should rejoice in public." Well, what I've realized is that wearing ashes on this day is like being at a rally. It's seeing all those who share this communal commitment to conversion during these six and a half weeks of Lent. It's like as we say, wearing a button, and for us we wear buttons of Nuns on the Bus at rallies, and that's what the ashes on our forehead become on Ash Wednesday.

We know who stands with us and shares our commitment. It's that shared commitment – a communal commitment that becomes critical for how we move forward together. Because Lent is not an individual action, it is communal, and in that communal action we have the hard work of being the Body of Christ, being engaged in our society. We know that when Christ was born – we celebrated Christmas not long ago, Christ as they say, "pitched his tent among us." And that same extension is what comes to us. We then have the responsibility of being God's body in our world – in a relationship – caring for those who are left out, caring for the marginalized, caring for the immigrant and the orphan, welcoming the stranger and the refugee, making sure that our faith values are extended. It's this one day of wearing our button, the sign that we're in this together with the ashes on our forehead that we know we stand together in community.

And it is as the first reading says, that it is the "urgency of now." That we need to gather the people, notify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children, the infants at breast, the bridegroom, and the bride – all of us need to come together in the urgency of now. And, right now in our nation, from my perspective it's never been more urgent, that we together, live our faith, and respond to the call – to be called to conversion. That is the hard work that is the urgency of now. So I urge you in this Lent, let your heart be broken open, respond to the needs around us, take it in as part of the Body of Christ that we are called in this challenging time to live the asceticism of letting ourselves weep for our nation and then take action.

So then it will be, as Paul says in the second reading, that it is an acceptable time when we hear the Lord's call to the day of salvation, and he closes by saying, "Behold now is a very acceptable time, behold now is the day of salvation."

Join me, I need you—and quite frankly you need me—to work together to create this day of salvation so that all are welcome. And 'We the People' in our nation and around the globe will know the fullness of the message of Jesus, "All are welcome, all are together, all live in dignity."

We can do it, I know we can – let's make this Lent about the communal act of conversion. Thank you.

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