

Lent Meditation 1



Ash Wednesday
— Lent Begins

Mt.6,1-6

The liturgical season of Lent, beginning with Ash Wednesday, gives us the opportunity to reflect on the fact that the path of the Christian faith lies in the shadow of the cross and the light of the resurrection (in this order!). The fact that Jesus announced to his disciples on 3 separate occasions that he, because he had to (!), would suffer and be rejected “by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law”, would be killed and after 3 days rise again, is certainly defining in some way for the journey of faith.

In fact, Jesus made this clear when immediately after the first prediction of his death he said:

“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.” (Mk.8,34f.)

Hopefully our Lent reflections can manage not to get bogged down fruitlessly in trying to examine and search ourselves by way of looking into a mirror reflecting to us only what we are, but to look as through a “glass darkly” onto what is real and worth losing one’s life for so as to save it.

Our first text is from the Sermon on the Mount, Mt.6,1-6. Jesus surrounded by his disciples is teaching them. Perhaps this ought to be the first step in our reflection – to be mindful not to just let Jesus have his say in a general sort of way but to let him speak *to us* and find us listening to him and hearing what he says. For it is those who hear and pay attention to what they hear who are also those who will receive. For such – hearing as disciples hear – may God give grace to us all. Mt.6,1-6:

‘Be careful not to practise your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honoured by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do

not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.'

By way of our faith, we are to consider that Jesus demands of us a better righteousness – one that is better than that owned and practised by hypocrites. (I don't, unfortunately, lack people who must readily agree with this demand of *me!*) Jesus does not demand religion and he does not demand religious appearances, but real-life righteousness working through selfless and cheerful giving rooted, as it alone is, in a faith which entrusts God with both one's needs and rewards. Let us reflect on the following:

- 1) This righteousness that is demanded is the only one that counts before God: It is one that does not seek to appear to others or be obvious to them, but seeks to be real, aiming to please God alone. I only *appear* to be righteous when I give or pray or fast when while doing so I want or seek approval from others for it, be this inside or outside of the church. To the extent that I seek and relish self -approval, I have no further reward to expect beyond feeling good about myself. Will righteousness here flourish? Can it?
- 2) Let us reflect on the fact that, given what Jesus here demands, I needn't worry about any transactional value of my giving, praying and fasting – I mustn't even have it in mind -, to do so would cheapen and devalue it. I can trust God for any reward and thus be ready for costly love and the denial of 'self'.
- 3) Let us reflect on the call to repentance in the light of the word of the cross which proclaims that Christ "*has become for us ... our righteousness...*" (1Cor.1,30), and the prayer "Lord, give us what you demand and demand what you will. Amen"