

Fr. David's Weekly Newsletter



February 24, 2012

First Sunday of Lent

Grant, almighty God, through the yearly observances of holy Lent, that we may grow in understanding of the riches hidden in Christ and by worthy conduct pursue their effects.

Through Christ's power we rise from ashes

The discipline of Lent should help the faithful gain more awareness of “the unthinkable nearness of God,” Pope Benedict XVI said as he led an Ash Wednesday service at the church of St. Sabina in Rome.

The Pope led the traditional Ash Wednesday procession from the church of St. Anselm, on the Aventine hill, to St. Sabina, where he celebrated Mass and distributed ashes. In his homily the Holy Father reflected on the ashes as a symbol of fasting and penance. “Ashes are the material sign that brings the cosmos into the liturgy,” the Pope said.

Recalling the ancient practice of sprinkling ashes on one’s head to signal penitence, the Pope also mentioned the blessing that refers to the ashes as “austere symbols.”

Pope Benedict spoke at greater length on the Ash Wednesday formula: “Remember man

that you are dust and unto dust you shall return.”

He observed that at the time of the Fall, the dust of the garden of Eden “takes on a negative connotation because of sin.” He cited the teaching of St. John Chrysostom that the curse God put on the soil “has a ‘medicinal’ function for man, who learns from the resistance of the earth to recognize his limitations and his own human nature.”

The warning that we are made of dust, and will return to dust, is a blunt reminder of human mortality, the Pope continued. But it is not cause for despair, because the faithful know that God can raise up mortal bodies to eternal life, and so fallen humans can regain paradise. The Pope quoted from Origen: “That which was flesh, earth, dust, and was destroyed by death and returned to dust and ashes, is made to rise again from the earth.”

*Your ways, O Lord, are love and truth
to those who keep your covenant.*

Lent a time for mature decisions

Lent is a journey of forty days that will lead us to the Paschal Triduum, memorial of the passion, death and resurrection of the Lord, the heart of the mystery of our salvation. In the early centuries of the Church this was the time when those who had heard and accepted the message of Christ began, step by step, their journey of faith and conversion to receive the sacrament of baptism. It was a drawing close to the living God and an initiation of the faith to be gradually accomplished, through an inner change in the catechumens, that is, those who wished to become Christians and thus be incorporated into Christ and the Church.

Subsequently, penitents, and then all the faithful were invited to experience this journey of spiritual renewal, to conform themselves and their lives to that of Christ. The participation of the whole community in the different steps of the Lenten path emphasizes an important dimension of Christian spirituality: redemption is not available to only a few, but to all, through the death and resurrection of Christ. Therefore, those who follow a journey of faith as catechumens to receive baptism, those who had strayed from God and the community of faith and seek reconciliation and those who lived their faith in full communion with the Church, together knew that the period before Easter is a period of metanoia, that is, of inner change, of repentance, the period that identifies our human life and our entire history as a process of conversion that is set in motion now in order to meet the Lord at the end of time.

In an expression that has become typical in the Liturgy, the Church calls the period in which we are now entering "Quadragesima," in short a period of forty days and, with a clear reference to Sacred Scripture, it introduces us to a specific spiritual context. Forty is in fact the symbolic number in which salient moments of the experience of faith of the People of God are expressed. A figure that expresses the time of waiting, purification, return to the Lord, the awareness that God is faithful to his promises. This number does not represent an exact chronological time, divided by the sum of the days. Rather it indicates a patient perseverance, a long trial, a sufficient period to see the works of God, a time within which we must make up our minds and to decide to accept our own responsibilities without additional references. It is the time for mature decisions.

The number forty first appears in the story of Noah. This just man because of the flood spends forty days and forty nights in the ark, along with his family and animals that God had told him to bring. He waits for another forty days, after the flood, before finding land, saved from destruction (Gen 7,4.12, 8,6). Then, the next stop, Moses on Mount Sinai, in the presence of the Lord, for forty days and forty nights to receive the Law. He fasts throughout this period (Exodus 24:18). Forty, the number of years the Jewish people journeyed from Egypt to the Promised Land, the right amount of time for them to experience the faithfulness of God: " Remember how for these forty years the LORD, your God, has directed all your journeying in

the wilderness... The clothing did not fall from you in tatters, nor did your feet swell these forty years, "says Moses in Deuteronomy at the end of the forty years of migration (Dt 8,2.4). The years of peace enjoyed by Israel under the Judges are forty (Judg. 3,11.30), but, once this time ended, forgetfulness of the gifts of God begins and a return to sin.

The prophet Elijah takes forty days to reach Horeb, the mountain where he meets God (1 Kings 19,8). Forty are the days during which the people of Nineveh do penance for the forgiveness of God (Gen 3,4). Forty were also the years of the reign of Saul (Acts 13:21), David (2 Sam 5:4-5) and Solomon (1 Kings 11:41), the first three kings of Israel. Even the biblical Psalms reflect on the meaning of the forty years, such as Psalm 95 for example, of which we heard a passage: "If you would listen to his voice today! " Oh, that today you would hear his voice: Do not harden your hearts as at Meribah, as on the day of Massah in the desert. There your ancestors tested me; they tried me though they had seen my works. Forty years I loathed that generation; I said: "This people's heart goes astray; they do not know my ways"(vv. 7c-10).

In the New Testament Jesus, before beginning of his public life, retires to the desert for forty days without food or drink (Matt. 4,2): he nourishes himself on the Word of God, which he uses as a weapon to conquer the devil. The temptations of Jesus recall those the Jewish people faced in the desert, but could not conquer. Forty are the days during which the risen Jesus instructs his disciples, before ascending to heaven and sending the Holy Spirit (Acts 1,3).

A spiritual context is described by this recurring number forty, one that remains current and valid, and the Church, precisely through the days of Lent, intends to maintain its enduring value and make us aware of its efficacy. The Christian liturgy of Lent is intended to facilitate a journey of spiritual renewal in the light of this long biblical experience and especially to learn how to imitate Jesus, who in the forty days spent in the desert taught how to overcome temptation with the Word of God. The forty years of Israel's wandering in the desert present us with ambivalent attitudes and situations. On the one hand they are the first season of love between God and his people when He spoke to his heart, continuously indicating the path to follow to them. God had pitched his tent, so to speak, in the midst of Israel, He preceded it in a cloud or a pillar of fire, ensured its daily nourishment showering manna upon them, and bringing forth water from rock. Therefore, the years spent by Israel in the desert can be seen as the time of the special election of God and adherence to Him by the people. The time of first love.

In these forty days that will lead us to Easter may we find new courage to accept with patience and with faith situations of difficulty, of affliction and trial, knowing that from the darkness the Lord will make a new day dawn. And if we are faithful to Jesus and follow him on the way of the Cross, the bright world of God, the world of light, truth and joy will be gifted to us once more: it will be the new dawn created by God himself.

CATHOLIC VOCABULARY

con·se·cra·tion

kon-si-krey-shuhn

noun

1. the act of consecrating; dedication to the service and worship of God.
2. the act of giving the sacramental character to the Eucharistic elements of bread and wine - when they are changed to the Body and Blood of Christ.
3. ordination to a sacred office, especially to the episcopate.

Origin: 1350–1400; Middle English *consecracio* (u) n (< Anglo-French) < Latin *consecratiōn-* (stem of *consecratiō*).



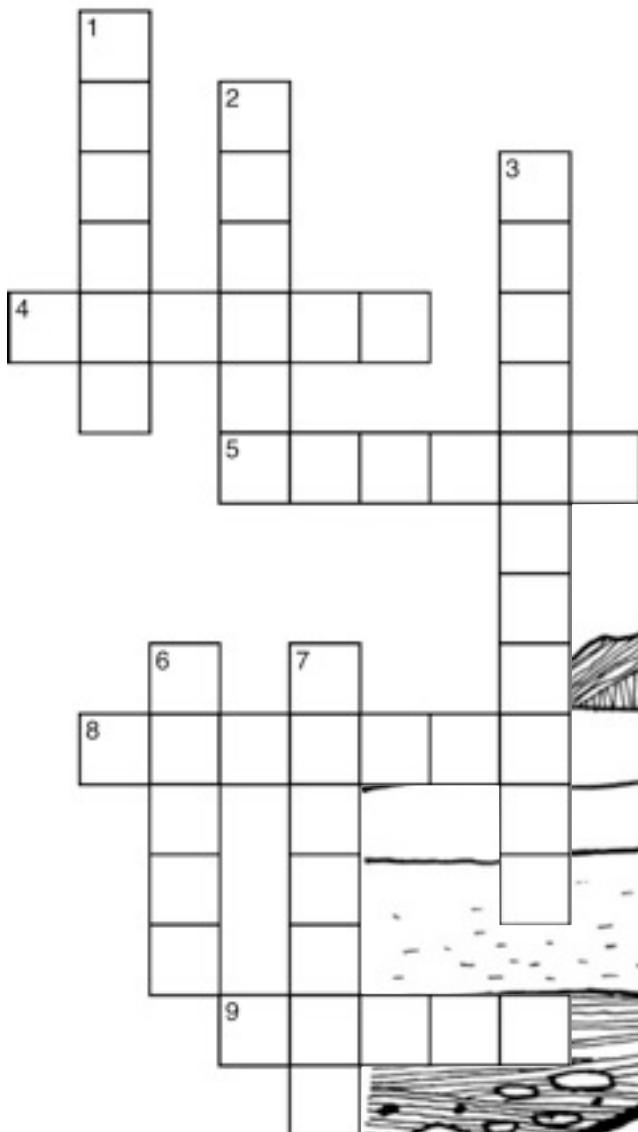
Consecration

Consecration, in general, is an act by which a thing is separated from a common and profane to a sacred use, or by which a person or thing is dedicated to the service and worship of God by prayers, rites, and ceremonies. The custom of consecrating persons to the Divine service and things to serve in the worship of God may be traced to the remotest times. We find rites of consecration mentioned in the early cult of the Egyptians and other pagan nations. Among the Semitic tribes it consisted in the threefold act of separating, sanctifying, or purifying, and devoting or offering to the Deity. In the Hebrew Law we find it applied to the entire people whom Moses, by a solemn act of consecration, designates as the People of God.

When we speak of consecration without any special qualification, we ordinarily understand it as the act by which, in the celebration of Holy Mass, the bread and wine are changed into the body and blood of Christ. It is called transubstantiation, for in the Sacrament of the Eucharist the substance of bread and wine do not remain, but the entire substance of bread is changed into the body of Christ, and the entire substance of wine is changed into His blood, the species or outward semblance of bread and wine alone remaining. This change is produced in virtue of the words: This is my body and This is my blood, or This is the chalice of my blood, pronounced by the priest assuming the person of Christ and using the same ceremonies that Christ used at the Last Supper.

First Sunday of Lent

Jesus in the Desert



ACROSS

4. What did Jesus tell people to do?
5. Who drove Jesus into the desert?
8. Where did Jesus proclaim the Gospel?
9. How many days did Jesus spend in the desert?

DOWN

1. What did Jesus tell people to believe in?
2. Who ministered to Jesus?
3. What time did Jesus say it was?
6. Who tempted Jesus in the desert?
7. What did Jesus say was "at hand?"

**PRAY.
FAST.
GIVE.**

