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Ash Wednesday

Date: Wednesday, February 14, 2018 | **Season:** Lent | **Year:** B
First Reading: Joel 2:12–18
Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 51:3–6ab, 12–14, 17 | **Response:** Psalm 51:3a
Second Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:20–6
Gospel Acclamation: Psalm 95:8
Gospel Reading: Matthew 6:1–6, 16–18
Preached at: the Jesuit Institute **in the** Archdiocese of Johannesburg, South Africa**.**

Today we celebrate Ash Wednesday, the day that around the world marks the beginning of Lent, the start of our long journey towards the resurrection at Easter. The prophet Joel says today, "Blow the trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly; gather the people. Sanctify the congregation!" And that is what we are doing and why we have come here together today. To deliberately decide to turn towards God. In the Northern Hemisphere Lent occurs during the spring time, where the days are lengthening after winter towards summer. Let our Lenten practices this Lent, stretch us, and help us to grow in relationship with God and with those we desire to be in relationship with. It is a time given to us by God, not to be miserable, but to return to God with all our hearts. To allow God to transform ourselves back into what he intended them to be all along. Let us be generous with the God who wants to re-shape us in God's image.

During Lent we renounce the delights of this world, leaving what is good so that we can choose what is better. This is why we fast during Lent. Lent is most of all a time of inner conversion, of reflecting on our lives, our habits, our relationships, with each other and most importantly with God. It is a time to return to God. Of trying to offer God some of our time and attention, deliberately so that we can repair, renew and refresh our relationship with Him.

Let us not waste this acceptable time, this day of salvation. Today is our chance to change, to begin anew, to repent and to be converted. We all, in some way great or small, have to change our attitude, our orientation, our way of living. Let us ask the Holy Spirit today to help us to make better choices. Let us always choose God. Let us always choose life. Let us always choose that which is bet-

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ter, and more pleasing to God. Let's not be afraid to let go of the things that have trapped us and kept us from God, so that we can – joyfully and with both hands – grasp the good things that God is offering us.

In turning back to God, repenting and believing in the Gospel we will be purified and so be able to experience the love and light of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ shining in our hearts on Easter morning, and throughout the year.

Perhaps there were one or two concrete things that came to us in prayer today that we might be able to do this Lent. Let's ask God now for the grace to commit to do those things, knowing that God would not ask anything of us without giving us the support and encouragement and grace to complete them. Let us also ask God that we be given the grace this Lent to experience God's love for us again as if for the first time – for God never tires of loving us, forgiving us, calling us, and accompanying us in our life.

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