

Ash Wednesday  
St. Matthew 6:16-21  
February 14<sup>th</sup>, 2024  
Sts. Peter and Paul Ev. Lutheran Church, UAC  
Simpsonville, SC  
Pastor Jerald Dulas

## Be Not as the Hypocrites

*In Nomine Iesu!*

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

### **Sermon Text:**

“Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may be seen of men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have received their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thy head, and wash thy face; that thou be not seen of men to fast, but of thy Father who is in secret: and thy Father, who seeth in secret, shall recompense thee.”

### **Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:**

O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today, my dear friends, we enter the season of Lent. You have probably heard it often said that Lent is a penitential season. Well, what does that mean? If Lent is a penitential season, how do we observe it? The penitential seasons are in the Church's year, so that we might prepare for the celebrations that come after them. How do we prepare? We prepare by looking at and considering our sinfulness, and what the consequences of our sinfulness are. The Church has established three exercises for us to do that help us in this task. They are prayer, fasting, and the giving of alms.

These three exercises really have one goal in mind, and it is stated in the Gospel reading. These are meant to focus our faith and our hearts on the treasures of Heaven. One should never look at his sin without looking at the cross of our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. And that is where this season of Lent is going to be taking us. It will take us to Good Friday; to the cross of our Lord + Jesus Who suffered our punishment after fulfilling the whole Law of God for us. He won for us the treasures of Heaven, by His death on the cross. He gives to us the spoils of victory that are rightfully His alone. He gives us forgiveness from our sins, an eternal life with Him in Heaven, and He gives us rescue and salvation from our enemies of this life, the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh.

In this life we still are attacked by our enemies and will be until our Lord + Jesus calls us home to be with Him in Heaven. Therefore, we must prepare for the battle with our enemies. We do this through the spiritual exercises that are meant to open our hearts and minds to receive the Word of God: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

Our Lord + Jesus knew that we would need to prepare for the daily struggle with our enemies, and so when He instructs us regarding these things, He does not say, “If” you fast, but “*When* you fast.”

The same is true for prayer and almsgiving, there is no “if” involved. *When you pray. When you give alms. When you fast.*

When we pray, we are defending ourselves against the attacks of the devil. For prayer cannot be done, without the Word of God. We cannot carry on a conversation with God if He is not speaking to us. Then it is not prayer, it is a lecture. We do not lecture God. We instead hear what God says and respond back to Him. This is why for Lutherans a special emphasis is placed upon the Small Catechism during the Lenten season. In it we learn what God would have us know about the Ten Commandments, and we learn from them, how little we have kept them, and how far we are from keeping them. We learn the Creed, which teaches us all we need to know about our Triune God, and how He made us, and redeemed us, and sanctifies us in His holy Church. He even gives us the means to respond to Him in the Lord’s Prayer. The Small Catechism also teaches us about how God made us His children in Holy Baptism and how He sustains us as His children through the spiritual meal in which He gives us His very Body and Blood in bread and wine. All that we learn in the Small Catechism teaches us to communicate with God and ask Him to send us His angel to watch over us, so that the wicked foe may have no power over us.

It teaches us to look at our sin, but it also teaches us that our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ paid the penalty of our sin, so that we might cling to Him in faith and have the treasures of Heaven that He won for us.

In the same way that prayer is our defense against the assaults and temptation of the devil. Fasting is our defense against the assaults of our sinful flesh. Our society teaches us that we should get all that we want and desire; that there is no feeling or joy of the flesh that we should be denied. And our Old Adam loves to hear that. It wants to do what it wants to do. It wants to do all the evil it desires with no consequences. Fasting is our way of telling the Old Adam, “No, you cannot have and do whatever you want.” Fasting usually takes the form of giving up some kind of food. When you give up, for example, some kind of food, you are teaching your body that it cannot have everything that it loves. You are teaching your soul that the things of this life are only ours because our Lord God gives them to us. Fasting is meant, like prayer, to turn our hearts to God; to look upon and hope for the treasures of Heaven. For the treasures of Heaven do not run out. They do not go bad. And our Lord God would have us enjoy the treasures of Heaven abundantly.

Also, when you fast, since you are spending less time eating, you have more time for prayer and study of God’s Word. You are also consequently spending less money on food. Just as the extra time should be spent in prayer and study of God’s Word the extra money that is saved from not spending it on groceries should be given to the Church and to those in need.

Almsgiving—our offerings to the Church and assistance for our fellowman—are our defense against the world. Like I said before, society would have us believe that we are worthy of whatever possessions we have. We however should remember that everything that we have in this life is a gift of God. We are just stewards of the things God has given to us. Our house, our family and spouses, our car, our clothes, everything. God has given these things to us for our benefit. These things can be taken away at a moment’s notice. When we remember this, we not only realize that anything that God has given to us that is above what we need, can go to serve the Church and our neighbor. But, more importantly, we remember that all the things of this life can pass away and be taken from us at any time. This is why when we deny ourselves the trappings of this life, our focus is directed to the true and lasting treasures of Heaven.

These treasures never fail us. When we cling to these treasures all the things of this life seem unnecessary. We see more clearly the lies of this world, how it entices us with its wares and with its philosophies and with its false religions. When we see the world’s lies, we desire to cling to the world

that is to come, Heaven. It will not pass away or be destroyed or be taken away from us. It is ours because our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ won it for us on the tree of the holy cross.

During this penitential season, as we journey to the cross of our Lord, let us spend time in prayer, in fasting, and in giving of alms, for they are meant to turn our hearts away from the things of this world to the things of our Lord God. He would have us cling to and trust in His heavenly treasures. For we are worthy of none of the things we possess. We are not even worthy of the forgiveness and salvation that our Lord + Jesus Christ won for us. He gives this to us all out of His grace, mercy, and love for us. Our Lord + Jesus shows us that love today in our Gospel reading when He tells us that He desires for us to not look to the trials, temptations, and trappings of this life, but He would have us focused upon and clinging to the eternal treasures of Heaven. Forgiveness of your sins, and eternal life in Heaven, and salvation from your spiritual enemies are all gifts that our Lord and Savior purchased and won for us on the tree of the holy cross. Lay up for yourselves these treasures during this penitential season, for they will always be there for you. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

**Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:**

Almighty God, be pleased to accompany Thy Word with Thy Holy Spirit and grant that Thy Word would increase faith in us; bring into the Way of Truth all such as have erred; turn the hearts of the unrepentant; and for sake of Thy Name grant succor to all heavy hearts and those who are heavy-laden, that they may through the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ be relieved and preserved so that they succumb not to the temptation of despair but rather that they gain the victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with the Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

**The Votum:**

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

*Soli Deo Gloria!*