

ASH WEDNESDAY

February 6, 2008 - Lois Holly

Joel 2:1-2, 12-17
2 Cor. 5:20b-6:10
Matt. 6:1-6,16-21
Psalm 103

I really, really love a liturgical church. I really, love the liturgical year.

I love the orderly progression of the seasons and the scriptures appointed to call my attention to the events and teaching of Jesus and God's people. I love the symbolism of the various colors for the seasons and special days.

I grew up in a very NON-liturgical tradition. Christmas and Easter just kind of appeared full-blown. And I guess that's alright.

But I find that I need reminders and maybe you do too. I need Joel's trumpet blast.

Hey, drop what you are doing, leave your life-as-usual direction
and return to God.

It doesn't matter if you just got married or just got ordained,
Gave birth to a baby or are contemplating your own death.

Turn your heart right now.

Lent begins with the word Remember. Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return. Very sobering; we don't really want to hear that. It reminds us of our own mortality and that we are limited, imperfect creatures. Someone once referred to Ash Wednesday as The Feast of No Kidding. This earth is passing and so are we. This is no kidding, friends.

But this does not mean that we are unimportant or that any one of us is insignificant. The opposite is true and the reason is that we are made in the image of likeness of the immortal, all-loving creator, who keeps calling us back, back to our baptismal covenant, back to our own souls, and back to His ways.

Remember—remember—remember.

I need reminders.

I need Ash Wednesday.

I NEED Lent.

There was a time, of course, when all Christians thought they didn't need Lent. After all, they had been baptized in the Lord.

They were filled with the Holy Spirit and
they lived life quite differently from the pagans.

The first real Lenten people were not Christians, but those preparing to become Christians. They wore sackcloth and ashes—traditional Jewish symbols of repentance—and lived the days before Easter as repentant sinners.

But all of that changed when the old timers in the Christian community noticed something remarkable at the Easter Baptism.

They were struck by the joy and the radiant faces of those just baptized. They, too, longed to experience the joy of new birth, new strength, and new life.

They realized they had become too ho-hum in their faith and desired to do something about it. And so the next year, some Christians began to join the catechumens in the preparation for baptism at Easter.

Those already baptized took on sackcloth and ashes, too and lived the days before Easter as repentant sinners.

They did this so that they could feel once again the joy of rebirth at Easter. Finally it became a 40 day devotional preparation for Easter, based on Jesus wilderness fast.

That is how Lent gradually came to the church. OUT OF NEED.

Even though Jesus had been baptized by John and “full of the Holy Spirit”, he felt a need to go into the desert.

After the desert, after his first temptation, Jesus realized who he was and what he was called to do. He came out of the desert with a gospel and a firm faith in his Father—that he would take to Calvary. We are like Jesus and the early Christians who felt a need to experience repentance. We share a common struggle and a common pain.

Like the early Christians, we are all driven by the same doubts.

We sometimes make choices about the most important events in our lives

Without reflection,

Without faith,

Without prayer,

Without God.

But, we cannot FORCE Lent upon ourselves.

Each of us must feel a need for it----a need to go into the desert to face both our gifts and our limits,

A need to face ourselves, our motives, our dreams and our God.

Let us go into the desert together to find out who we are and what we are called to do.

WE HAVE A NEED.