

Let us pray.

O Lord, God of mercy, forgive us all our sins for the sake of the bitter sufferings of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Grant us a triumphant faith by which we may obtain the victory in all afflictions and temptations, and uphold us by Your grace when we must pass through the valley of the shadow of death. Amen.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

Ash Wednesday has a way of speaking the truth that we don't want to hear.
I don't want to hear.

I don't want you to suffer or cry or have to bury anyone.
I don't want you to die.

But the ashes on your forehead have marked each and every one of you—
even the babies—
as the dying.

I try my best not to think about it.

Your joy and your energy, your love and your service are constant signs that all is well.

But the reality is that all *isn't* well.

Those ashes on your forehead speak of a reality we all try to cover up.
That we are the dying.
We are those suffering the consequences of sin.

And even though we try to hide it,
and even though we avoid thinking about our sin at all costs,
it's there.

It's so deeply imbedded in our bones and flesh that no matter how hard we fight,
no matter how much make-up we put on,
we are sinners marked for death.

This Lent, during the midweek services, we'll come together and admit that we're all dying.
It'll be like a support group.
But instead of working our way out of it,
we'll hear of someone who shouldn't be in our group,
but wanted to be a part of it nonetheless.

Together we'll confess our guilt, our shame, our failures and omissions, our anger, and our pain.

And we'll do all this confessing by way of the Psalms.

The Psalms are our prayer book.
They're God's word given to us to say back to Him.

When you're lonely, He tells you how to speak of your loneliness.
When you're depressed, He gives you the words to cry out for help.
When you're angry at God for taking all that is good from you,
 for causing you all sorts of pain and suffering,
 for taking your family from you,
 and for letting you get a bad grade or a poor review—
 the Psalms provide the script for your complaint.
Yes, the Psalms tell us how to cry out against God!

Each week we'll focus on a different Psalm directed specifically towards repentance.

These are what the Church calls, *the Penitential Psalms*.

And today, it's Psalm 6.

Psalm 6 is for anyone marked with Ashes.
It's a Psalm for the dying.

If you're not a sinner, you can't pray Psalm 6—go find another one!

For here we cry out to God in desperation.

“O Lord, rebuke me not in your anger, nor discipline me in your wrath” (6:1).

Here we admit our sin.

We confess together that we deserve His anger and His wrath.

And more than that, we admit we're already experiencing the suffering and the sorrow of our sin:

“Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am languishing; heal me, O Lord, for my bones are troubled. My soul also is greatly troubled” (6:2-3).

Our bodies are wasting away, our souls are burdened by our guilt.

How long can we keep going like this?

How long will God seem so distant?

How long until He starts acting like God again and comes to save and help me?

Don't worry—it's not blasphemy to talk to God like that.

That's the way He gives us to talk, just look at verse 3:

“But you, O Lord—how long?” (6:3).

And then the Psalm shows us what we should be asking God to do:

“Turn, O Lord, deliver my life; save me for the sake of your steadfast love” (6:4).

That is to say,

“God, stop beating me down.

Stop hiding your face from me.

Stop taking away those I love.

Turn, repent, and be the God you’ve promised to be.

Not for my sake.

Not because I deserve it—I don’t.

But because that’s who *You* are; because of *your* steadfast love.”

That’s the way faith speaks.

It holds God not to something we deserve or have earned,

but it holds God to who He is.

Our God is the God who delights in our prayer.

He loves mercy.

He rejoices to heal and to save and to rescue.

And more than anything else,

He loves to do it all for us.

And He does it all by way of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Because of Christ—

because He has made the Lenten journey

down from heaven

through the wilderness of our sinful world,

and all the way to the cross and grave—

we can be certain that our God hears our prayer.

So it says in verses 8 and 9:

“Depart from me, all you workers of evil, for the Lord has heard the sound of my weeping. The Lord has heard my plea; the Lord accepts my prayer” (6:8-9).

This is most certain in Christ, the Son of God, crucified for you.

And when we are certain that God hears our prayer—

when we believe that our pleas for mercy are heard by the Father in heaven,

then we have what we’ve been praying for all along.

We have the gift of forgiveness.

This Psalm has led us all the way from the fear of our death,

the truth that the ashes on our forehead proclaim,

to the certainty that our enemies will be ashamed and we will live!

That’s how our God works—

He gives us the very words that we are to say.
 He teaches us to confess,
 He teaches us to believe,
 and in all of this, He gives us Himself!

Our Lenten journey is one of repentance—
 and that road means coming together to confess our sins, confess our dying,
 and yet believe that this Jesus is the one who entered our sin and death for us.

He took it all with Him to the cross,
 and there He let it die.

So while your ashes speak a true word that we'd rather not hear—
 those ashes are cleaned off your forehead by water,
 much like the water that cleaned the sin off you at your baptism.

Take these Psalms home with you.
 Let them guide your prayer.
 Let them help you repent of your sins and believe in your savior.

For the Lord hears your plea; He accepts your prayer.
 Your suffering and enemies will all come to an end—
 and in Christ, they're already turned back and put to sahem.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit