

February Newsletter 2024

By the Time of Pope Gregory the Great (540 AD), the three Sundays before Lent, Septuagesima, Sexagesima, and Quinquagesima, had already been celebrated in Rome.

Due to the repeated attacks by the Goths, it was seen as a time for additional penitence and prayer. By the year 1540 customary fasts were ordered on Friday and Saturday and on the forty days of Lent. During Lent, altars were arrayed in violet or black and songs of joy were omitted such as the Gloria and Alleluia, organs were silent, and weddings were forbidden. The practice of celebrating Candlemas and the imposition of ashes was suppressed after the reformation until the practices were brought back and observed in the church.

Ashes are placed on the foreheads of those desiring them as an ancient act and gesture of repentance and a powerful reminder that we are dust and will die because of our sins.

Repentance is called for as well as a trust in the cleansing work of Jesus who suffered and died for each of us to atone for our sin and bring everlasting life. It is a time of great humility and suppressed joy. It is a time to fast and give up something, not as a means of merit, but as a means of remembering our Lord who gave up His life for ours. It is a time for self-control over the body and the desires of the heart so that we can focus more on salvation through Christ alone. None of this is mandatory. Yet, practices in the church bring great depth and meaning to our lives when we often forget and easily discard the love of God who sent His only begotten Son into this world to save sinners, like you and me.

This year, Fat Tuesday is on February 13th, which means that Ash Wednesday is on Valentines Day. That is the day we often celebrate with candy, going out to eat, proclaiming our Love for our husband, wife, boyfriend, or girlfriend. This year may seem a little different to hold the two events in tension. One celebrates our love for one another while the other remembers the great Love of our Lord. How you recognize the day is ultimately up to you.

Services for Lent will be held at Noon this year, a slight departure from last year when we held service at 12:30. I recommend a book entitled *An Explanation of the History of the Suffering and Death of Our Lord Jesus Christ*. It is a collection of sermons by Johann Gerhard that leads you through the events of Holy Week. Another pastor I know spends the time reading this book with his vicar every year. May God bless this Lenten season and prepare us for a beautiful Easter of rejoicing.

Pastor Ficken