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Gospel for Ash Wednesday

Gospel for Ash Wednesday and
commentary.

Gospel (*Mt* 6:1-6.16-18)

Jesus said to his disciples: “Beware of practicing your piety before men in order to be seen by them; for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.

“Thus, when you give alms, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you

give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

“And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

“And when you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ¹⁷ But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by men

but by your Father who is in secret;
and your Father who sees in secret
will reward you.”

Commentary

Today Lent begins, the forty days of preparation for Easter. And as every year, the Church raises her voice to remind us of the call to penance and personal conversion.

The violet priestly vestments and veil covering the tabernacle attract our attention. And the words “Remember you are dust and unto dust you will return” introduce us to this liturgical time leading up to the central mysteries of our faith.

In the Gospel passage that the Church invites us to consider today, our Lord focuses on the key acts of

personal piety: almsgiving, fasting and prayer.

There is no greater sacrifice than a clean heart (cf. *Ps* 50). Therefore Jesus, knowing the possibility of a merely external fulfillment of these practices, teaches us that true piety requires a right intention, sincerely seeking God and fleeing from all ostentation.

Purity of heart is achieved through intimate communion with God. Our prayer therefore must necessarily be marked by the simplicity and truthfulness with which we seek Him and allow ourselves to be found by Him.

“Let our mind be in conformity with what our lips say,” Saint Benedict wrote in his famous *Regula*. And now, in this time of special penance, our senses, body and all our actions also need to be in accord with what we say with our words.

That is why prayer is so closely linked to fasting and almsgiving. It is hard to have a personal and loving dialogue with our Father God that is not accompanied by works. This is authentic prayer, a prayer that gives life to others and that changes our own lives.

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