

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

“Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” With these Words the Lord bids you examine yourself. He bids you ask yourself what is in your heart, what is most important in your life. He bids you consider what you spend your days pursuing, what you strive after, what brings you the greatest joy, what is your ultimate goal. What occupies your thoughts and your planning? What do you dream of? What do you hope for? What is it that you love the most?

These, you see, are the things of the heart. By His Words the Lord asks you to examine your heart. It is not that He doesn't know what is in your heart. He does. He knows it better than you do, for fleshly men don't appearances even to fool themselves. Men see what is on the outside. When they fast they don't sad countenances and disfigure their faces, to make sure that other men know that they are fasting. So their fasting is for naught. A stomach ache is their full reward, for their fast is not sincere, it is for show – even if it is to fool themselves.

The hearts of such men are set on worldly, not spiritual things. Their hearts are set on things that rust and spoil. They feign humility and piety as a veneer for pride and conceit. But God sees their hearts. And God sees your heart. So it is to such men, and it is to you, that the Prophet is given to proclaim “Rend your heart, and not your garments.”

External humility does nothing to change your heart. God's Words this day/night direct you not to what is external, but rather to what is internal. He points you to the very center of man, your very center. He bids you look deeply, and honestly, into yourself. Look, and see if you have sinned. For God demands not simply outward, external, repentance; not torn clothes and a sad face, but rather sincere, inward, heart-felt repentance.

That you rightly examine your heart, the Beloved Disciple gives you a rule by which to measure what you find deep within yourself: If you say you have no sin, you deceive yourself, and the truth is not in you. If you look sincerely into your inmost parts and say that you have not sinned, you make God a liar, and His Word is not in you.

If you are honest, you should be heartbroken at your sin, ashamed of your sin, scandalized by what you have done, and by the thoughts that have darkened your heart. Which is to say that the ashes on your face avail you nothing if they are only skin deep.

If you're honest, you must confess that there has been darkness in you. There is the ancient darkness that comes with your fallen flesh, the darkness of those cast out. But there is another darkness, a self-wrought darkness, that is born of the first. It is the darkness of the sins and transgressions and trespasses that you have committed each day.

And it is those grave transgressions that reveal what is deep inside of you, what has filled your heart. It is your actual sins that confess what is truly important to you, your trespasses that demonstrate what you strive after. They are the true measure, the clear reflection, of what you hold to be real treasure, of what fills your heart.

And so this day/night you fall on your knees and beat your breast. You don't ashes, the sign of death. You confess that you have sinned and offended God, and justly deserve His temporal and

eternal punishment. And you hear anew the Words of that ancient curse “Remember, O Man, that thou art dust, and to dust shalt thou return.”

And you repent. You repent of your sins. You do as the Lord bids through the Prophet Joel. You turn to Him with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning. You rend your heart. And for you, you who wear ashes and honestly confess your sinfulness, for you God has a Word of reconciliation, a Word of mercy. For He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness.

Repentance has two parts: contrition and faith. Contrition is heartfelt sorrow for your sins. Faith turns, not to run from God, but saving faith turns to God. So God bids you through the Prophet “Turn to Me with all your heart...” Saving faith turns to Christ. Saving faith trusts that He alone can forgive sin.

For if you confess your sins, God is faithful and just to forgive your sins, and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness. That is God’s promise for you. He bids you deny your flesh, and walk in the Light, for He is Light. He gives you have fellowship with one another, and fellowship with Himself, for the Blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses you from all sin.

Yes, you wear on your face the ashen sign of death. But it is not the sign of your death. It is the sign of the cross. It is the sign of the Death died for you. As the Prophet promised, The Bridegroom came out of the mysterious chamber of the Virgins’ womb to die for His Bride, for you, His Holy Church. Your dressing room is the baptismal font, where He vests you in His righteousness. God relents from doing harm, for His full wrath was poured out upon His Son.

He submitted to those who desired to publicly ridicule Him, to those who strove to make a spectacle of Him, to those who longed to humiliate Him. He willingly gave His cheek to those who struck Him. His perfect, precious brow was pierced by thorny crown, the crown thrust upon Him to shame Him. By purple robe they mocked Him. By scourge they tore His sinless flesh.

And with hatred and spikes they took His life, on the cross that marks your face this day/night. By that cross you confess that He died for you, that He rendered His Holy life as full payment for your sins. For it was there, on the cross, that His heart was rent, as Roman spearpoint proved that He gave His life for you. And the Blood of Jesus Christ cleanses you from all sin. His heart was rent, that you receive a clean heart, a new heart, a heart full of faith, a heart full of Christ.

Yes, you wear the ashen cross, scribed upon your flesh. But faith knows that your Lord is not dead. He did not return to the dust. He defeated death and the grave. He did it for you. So while the paraments are violet this day/night, the bright gold of Easter is ever before you. You are never without the hope that only the Gospel can bring. And this day/night your Bridegroom, your King, brings heavenly treasure to you. He gives you His Body and His Blood, that while your flesh fasts, your soul feasts – your soul feasts upon Christ.

For faith there is no better Divine Gift, no more precious Heavenly Treasure, than Christ, Christ for you. And where your Treasure is, there your heart will be also.

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