
LET US PRAY

Creator God,
recreate our hearts this Lent.

Give us new eyes for the needs of your
people in their great want.

Train our hands for the humble
service you ask of us each day.

Deepen our hunger for that baptismal
living through which you call us to
help renew your beloved people and world,
in justice and in peace.

In your precious and life-giving
name we pray.

AMEN.



ASH WEDNESDAY



**“Even now, says the Lord, return
to me with your whole heart,
with fasting, and weeping, and
mourning; rend your hearts,
not your garments, and return
to the Lord, your God.”**

JOEL 2:12-13



With these words the prophet Joel calls us to our great annual retreat, the 40 days of Lent.

We in Catholic health know that the pressures of work and life are stressful and daunting. Day's end often finds us drained and burned out. This time of retreat is our yearly opportunity to reset priorities, to set aside time for God, for one another and for works of compassion and justice.

What is at stake is our sense of living out God's calling. This sense of call is often buried under accumulated layers of life and work. This is a matter of the heart. Joel invites us back to the journey of our "whole heart," to discover again the roots of our vocation. It is a time to return to the Lord and to a deeply felt orientation to those whose lives we are privileged to share and serve.

Lent is our journey back to the wellsprings of hope and compassion that make our lives rich and worthwhile. For Christians, the cross of ashes traced upon us today will become newly burnished at Easter; once again that resplendent cross traced on our foreheads at Baptism. This journey helps us center ourselves in that deep desire that roots our lives in God and care for one another.

At Easter we will immerse our newcomers to faith in the waters of baptism and renew our own baptismal commitment. It is a recommitment to our calling to extend the Lord's healing touch, especially to those in greatest need. We do not do this alone. Joel inaugurates our Lenten retreat by bringing us together: "Call an assembly. Gather the people" (Joel 2:15-16). Only by taking this journey together can we hope to find the support and passion necessary to give our hearts and hands once again to the Lord's great work of healing this broken, beloved world one person, one patient, one co-worker at a time.

FOR REFLECTION

*My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going.
... and the fact that I think I am following your will does not
mean that I am actually doing so.
But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you.
And I hope that I have that desire in all that I am doing.
I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.*

(Thomas Merton, Trappist monk and spiritual guide, 1915-1968)

- ◇ How will you simplify your life this Lent and make time to pay closer attention to your longing for God?
- ◇ How will you give a special place this Lent to those "most in need"— among family and friends, in your health care setting?
- ◇ How can you challenge your organization to even greater commitment to those in need, especially those who cannot pay or can pay only partially for our care (e.g., Medicaid panels)?