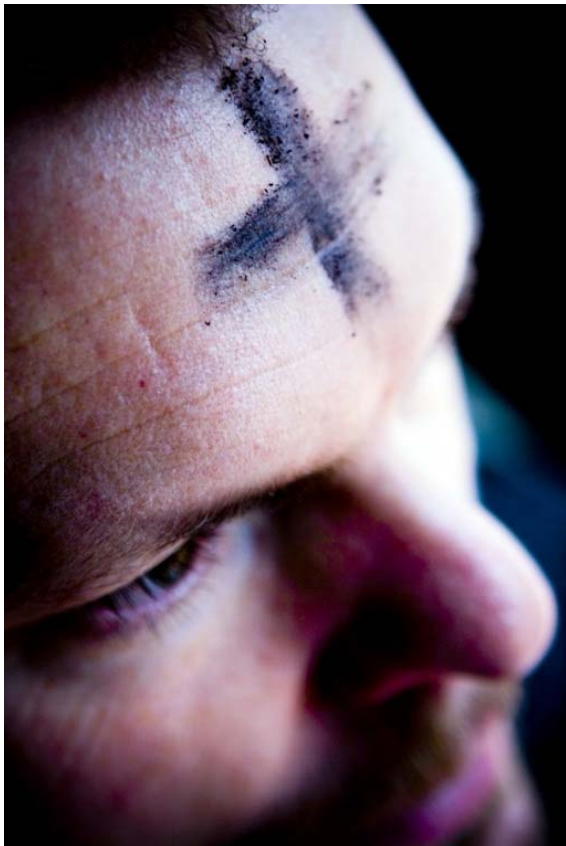


LENT

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Ash Wednesday- 2010

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Each year on Holy Thursday evening, the sober joy of Lent gives way to the joyful wonder of the Paschal Triduum. At the Mass of the Lord's Supper, we hear the new commandment of love and act it out literally in the ritual of the washing of feet. As we put the word we hear into practice, we celebrate the Lord who has given us the grace to live "according to the pattern of his holy Gospel."

Today, at the other end of Lent, it is not so. Today too we hear a command of Jesus:

"But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to be fasting, except to your Father who is hidden. And your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you." (Matthew 6: 17-18)

At today's Mass, after hearing the Gospel, we all line up to do not what Jesus commands, but the opposite. Unlike Holy Thursday, when we act out the command of Christ as literally as we can, today we do just what Jesus says not to do. He tells us to wash our faces, and then we all scramble to have someone put dirt on our heads. It is a kind of ritualization of our failure to live the Gospel, a common confession that we have not done what the Lord commands, a plain and public admission of our unfaithfulness.

May the humility of our mutual and public confession break our hearts open. May the open wounds of our compunction be a path for the grace of baptism to pour into us anew. By the time we arrive at Holy Thursday night, may we have been transformed anew by the God who makes willing and humble disciples even out of hypocrites.

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