

The Shepherd's Staff Newsletter

The Right Reverend D. M. Ashman

Mid Lent 2026

Synod Notes and Reminders



Please, O please consider bringing items for the Bishop's Auction. We had a special donation this year: these beautiful vestments were graciously donated by St. Bartholomew's in Washington. If you win the bid, please make arrangements to have your winning item(s) transported to its destination. All funds raised by this auction will be used to defray the cost of the Clergy (and Seminarians) to attend the Synods. Thank you, and we look forward to seeing you at the 35th Annual Synod!

**And don't forget the make your hotel reservations and send in your registrations.
The deadline is March 20th. Be sure to get you get your reservations in order.**

From the Mane Lion - St. Mark's Portland The Meaning of Lent

In Old English (Anglo-Saxon) the word for Springtime was *Lencten*, which literally meant the lengthening, a reference to the days getting longer at the close of winter. St Augustine of Canterbury's mission led to the conversion of the English people in the south of the country. As part of his evangelizing strategy Augustine often used native customs and words to familiarize the people with the gospel. What we now call Lent was referred to as some version of the word Passover on the continent, but was rendered into English as *Lenctenes faest* or *Lenten fast* – Spring fast, as our forebears commemorated Christ's 40-day fast in the desert.

Baptism in Denver - Lent III



Father Dan Canda Baptizing Ezra Zak James Segura



A Sermon for Lent III

In C. S. Lewis *The Screwtape Letters* there is a frightening discourse given by Screwtape, a senior devil, to his nephew, Wormwood, about the principles of ownership. Screwtape points out that when humans claim to own anything, such claims sound equally funny both in heaven and hell. Men and women, he says, think that they actually own their own bodies, until they find themselves ejected by another without their consent. But the most important confusion that men and women must be tricked into about ownership concerns their idea of God. Screwtape then carefully instructs Wormwood on how to teach humans to treat God as any other so-called possession. The idea being that, if a human can be taught that his boots or his dog or his wife really belong to him, then such a fool can easily be taught that God belongs to him as well. Thus, MY GOD can be made to mean not the God who, in the words of today's Collect, shows those who are in error the light of truth, but rather the god on whom the foolish man or women thinks he or she has a claim for distinguished services rendered, like 20 years on the Altar Guild, or five terms on the Vestry, or even tithing. In like manner, the foolish priest can be convinced that it is really he who has the gift of preaching, when all along he has been impressing himself in the pulpit. Or the foolish Senior Warden who can be convinced that he is really the only "brains" in the parish, when all along it is others who have made him look good.

We need to understand that God created us, God loves us and God guides us, which is another way of restating the Scriptural Truth that God the Father created us, God the son redeemed us and God the Holy Ghost sanctifies us. But in our pride we so often turn it around and, instead of acknowledging God as our Creator, Redeemer and Guide, we treat God as if he were any other possession, telling him what we want and closing our minds to His revelation to us. In *Exodus 19*, God clearly tells the Children of the Hebrews that he saved them from Pharaoh and that the whole world was made by him and is his. And so, if they should obey him they would be his special treasure and his people. In *John 15*, Jesus is even clearer. He says that he is the vine and we are the branches. If we live in him and allow him to live in us, we will bring forth good fruit. If we keep his commandments and live in his love, then we will find that path to joy in this world and the next. It is so simple a principle, to belong to God, and, yet, because of disobedience and pride, it can be so complicated and so very difficult to do.

The point is that God's Covenant (Old Testament or New) has never been an agreement between two parties made on equal terms. God and man never meet on equal terms. It was God who offered his created children **his** Covenant, on **his** terms. And mankind can only accept or reject God's Covenant. In Acts 8, after Philip the Deacon explained how Christ fulfilled the writings of the Prophet Isaiah to the Ethiopian Eunuch, the Ethiopian asked if he could be baptized. Philip answered that if he believed with all his heart, he might be baptized. The Eunuch said that he believed and he was baptized. Submission to our blessed Lord must be freely desired by those of us who would be called Christians. Parents are often shocked when their children do not want to go to church, or do not seem to have the faith that their parents have. But parents (and priests) often forget that a child must come to God, because the child **wants** to come to God, not because we authority figures command him or her to come to God. If a child does not know rebellion, he or she cannot know submission. We teach our children the Faith and we set the proper example. Then it is up to our children to choose. It is truly said that God has no grandchildren. Our children must choose to be the sons of God for themselves. Just because we are God's children, doesn't bring our children along too. They must freely choose!

And make no mistake about it, the best way we can teach our children, unbelievers and our weaker brethren is by good example. We must manifest Jesus Christ in our lives. We must teach the Faith by our wisdom and our holiness. We must show to them, as Jesus showed to his itinerant flock, the doing of God's will in our lives. Being holy is not being holier than thou. If we are holy, then we belong to God and recognize that we are pilgrims and strangers in this world. By voluntary submission, we come to understand that we own nothing and that God created everything. By simple humility, we show the world how Jesus wants humans to live. We learn that we cannot control or even outguess God, but we can show others that we believe "*thy kingdom come, thy will be done.*" We can teach them that the higher forms of prayer do not badger God with selfish requests and petulant demands, but, knowing that God cares for us, we pray for his will to be done. Remember that Solomon asked for wisdom to serve God, not for possessions and luxury. Solomon knew that God gives more than we can want or desire. He trusted God. Do you remember the story of the two boys who wanted a new bike for Christmas? They both prayed for those bikes. On December 26, they compared notes. One boy got his bike, the other didn't. The one who did said to the other, "*God did not answer your prayer.*" The other boy retorted, "*Sure he did. He said no!*"

When you pray, do you pray for what you want? Do you pray for wisdom? Do you ask God to help others? Do you thank God for his continuing gifts of grace to you? In the church so many people are convinced that if the church is not large and successful with a splendid edifice filled with stunning appointments and myriads of always-happy people, then, somehow, God has not answered their prayers. Sometimes, when some visitor says, "I'll be back" and we never see them again, or when I see that look of disappointment in a visitor's eyes because we are not more materially successful, I consider the countless Christians who died willingly in the arenas of ancient Rome, or the nameless missionaries who struggled in tiny buildings before they were well endowed churches, or who, rich or poor, just prayed to God for the grace to get them through one more day. I know that God helps those who help themselves. But sometimes God has a good reason for not helping us in the way WE THINK he ought to have helped us. Perhaps he is testing our faith, or humility, or charity. Perhaps God is using our small size and relative poverty (although I don't see any of us lacking much of anything) to show others the Kingdom of God. God tests us in ways that are so mysterious! C. S. Lewis related that in 1948 Oxford University abolished compulsory attendance at daily chapel. Many people were outraged, but Lewis pointed out that because the compulsion was removed, then it was a test for everyone. It was a test to see who really wanted to be there. I think about that too, some Sundays, when I hear the excuses for not coming to church!

Yes, indeed, sometimes, when we ask for material things, large churches, many dollars, success or glamour, we are asking for things that are not necessarily what God has in mind for us. In the days of the early church, even before the disciples and apostles were called Christians, there were four kinds of people. The Sadducees symbolized by the Temple, who were the party of the high priest. They collaborated with the Romans, turned their position as priests into a profitable enterprise and used their religion and priestly privilege to accommodate their lust for power. As a result they could not see God, even when He stood before them in the flesh. Not could the Pharisees who exalted the law with minute regulations and demands to the point where, although they seemed righteous, they had really twisted religion into a comfortable and respectable code devoid of any real belief in Yahweh or love for others. Then there were the Zealots, who were the revolutionaries who twisted God's promise of a messiah into a nationalistic battle cry that failed to hear God's voice and could see no kingdom, except in this world. All three groups thought of God a their possession, their "genie in a bottle" just for them. Just as many churchmen today, they were convinced by the Wormwoods and Screwtapes that God could be exploited for personal gain and privilege, just like any other possession.

But there was a fourth group. These were the men and women from all walks of life. Mostly they were poor, but they were always poor in spirit. They did not own God but were humble and devout. They did not set out to change the world but waited patiently for God's redemption. They were sinners, ordinary men and women who, like Mary Magdalene and Saint Paul, repented and followed Christ. These people were the faithful few who listened to God and tried to do his will and not their own. They were the saints. They understood their profession as pilgrims and strangers in the world. They were not interested in possessing what they did not need and they made the Screwtapes and Wormwoods quiver in fear. Before the New Testament was put to writing, they told and retold the story of Jesus' miracles and Jesus' sayings. They knew the words we heard in this morning's Gospel. They knew the danger of casting out evil and replacing it with nothing, so that worse evils might come. They knew that by God's grace they would hear the word of God and keep it. So let us never forget that, with all our technology, with all the years that separates us from them, **nothing has changed**. We either tell God what we want, or we listen to the word of God – and keep it!

The Way Many of Our Churches Began

