



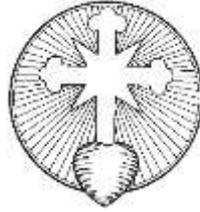
ABOUT THE PROPER

An Explanation of the Variable Parts of the Divine Service



First Day of Lent
Ash Wednesday

February 18, 2026



Exactly What I Need: Forgiveness

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of the penitential season of Lent, during which we remember our sins and mortality and heed God's call to repent. The name for this festival comes from the ancient practice of placing ashes in the form of a cross on the forehead of worshippers to remind them that they are dust, and to dust they will return. Moved by the Holy Spirit's working on our hearts through the proclamation of God's holy law, we realize the trouble we are in, recognize our sinfulness, and admit our guilt. Fully aware of these facts, we realize that what we need most from God is forgiveness. Therefore, we humbly fall before God and plead for him to pardon us. The good news is that God has heard our cries for mercy. He has sent us a Savior – Jesus Christ – to live perfectly in our place, suffer the punishment we deserve because of our sins, conquer death, and give us complete forgiveness!

First Lesson ¹

Isaiah 59:12-20

Returning to the Lord means understanding the depth of our sinfulness and the multitude of our offenses. It means despairing of our own worth or ability and recognizing that we have all together become corrupt. Our offenses are ever with us, so God himself worked the salvation we could not; he provided the righteousness we failed to give. The call to repentance reminds us that the Lord is coming again, clothed in righteousness and salvation, but also in vengeance and zeal. He comes to repay his enemies according to what they have done (v 18), but for the repentant, he repays them according to what *he* has done (v 16). Return to the Lord, and your Redeemer will come!

Second Reading ¹

2 Corinthians 7:8-13a

God wants us to have godly sorrow over sin that leads to salvation. Godly sorrow brings repentance, not regret. Worldly sorrow leads only to regret that binds and imprisons us in our past sins. Godly sorrow leads to repentance that opens the prison doors and sets us free from the past, free to return to God, free to sin no more.

Gospel

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

The Gospel is part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Jesus warns that pious looking actions done in hope of being praised by others will not receive commendation from the Heavenly Father. True piety is born of humility. Humble hands come from humble hearts.

Psalm of the Day ⁴

Psalm 51 A

“Be Merciful, O Lord”

The Church sings Psalm 51 in services that emphasize repentance, both contrition and faith. It is classified as the middle of the seven penitential psalms (6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143) and is the first of the biographical psalms of David (51-60). Martin Luther said, “Psalm 51 is one of the most prominent teaching psalms. David teaches us correctly what sin is, where it comes from, what damage it does, and how a person becomes free from it. In this psalm, like nowhere else, sin is clearly shown to be an inheritance, born in us. No works can remove it; only God's grace and forgiveness can do that.”

Gospel Acclamation Joel 2:13

“Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love.” In repentance, the Holy Spirit moves us to flee from sin and the devil and turn back to God, our gracious Lord. In his grace (undeserved love), mercy (compassion), patience (“slow to anger”), and steadfast love (enduring and unflinching care for us), he grants forgiveness.

Prayer of the Day

Almighty and merciful God, you never despise what you have made and always forgive those who turn to you. Create in us such new and contrite hearts that we may truly repent of our sins and obtain your full and gracious pardon; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Hymn of the Day 650 “From Depths of Woe, Lord God, I Cry” (Martin Luther, 1483-1546)

Luther put special effort into writing this hymn, and it became one of his favorites. Whenever Luther became troubled, he would gather his friends and sing this hymn. It was sung at the funeral of Elector Frederick the Wise of Saxony, the friend and patron of Luther. It was also sung as Luther’s body lay in state in Halle, Germany on February 20, 1546.

Church Year Season² Lent

The season of Lent leads the Church on a forty-day journey of repentance and prayer, of remembrance and renewal of our baptism. God calls to mankind: Return to the Lord! The journey begins with Ash Wednesday’s warning of mortality and culminates at the Service of Holy Baptism in the Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday.

The Church’s Lenten worship is muted and quiet. For centuries, the Church has omitted her most jubilant songs of praise during this season of repentance (e.g. the “Gloria in Excelsis,” and the use of the word “Alleluia”) to reflect the somber nature of the season. Note, however, that the Sundays are designated as Sunday in Lent, not Sundays of Lent. The Sundays themselves are not considered part of the forty days, but are islands of refreshment in our Lenten walk.

Colors & Symbolism Black

Black is the absence of color. It symbolizes mourning, sin, death – especially Jesus’ death on the cross wherein he suffered the wrath of God against sin for all mankind.

Traditions & Customs Ash Wednesday

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of the Lenten season. The name for the festival comes from the medieval custom of believers coming to church on this day in sackcloth and throwing ashes over their heads – an expression of repentance. These ashes were made from the burnt palms on the previous year’s Palm Sunday mixed with oil.

Some Christians have followed the custom of rubbing ashes on their foreheads in the shape of a cross. This ceremony called “the imposition of ashes” reminds believers of God’s Law: “Remember, O man, that you are dust and to dust you shall return.” After this, the Gospel is individualized at the Lord’s Supper with the words, “Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.”

Nain Paraments Good Friday

Lectern & Pulpit antependia: The Cross is the most recognizable symbol for Jesus, his Church, his sacrificial death, and his victory over sin and death. The apostle St. Paul used the image of the cross as a way to sum up the Gospel of God’s saving work through Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:18; Galatians 6:14). On the cross, God’s Son suffered and died to pay for the sins of the world. By God’s grace and through faith, we are cleansed by Christ’s blood (Hebrews 10:10).

¹ Courtesy of “Planning Christian Worship: Year A”. Jonathan E. Schroeder, Author.

² Courtesy of “Planning Christian Worship: Year B”. Daniel M. Deutschlander, Author.

³ Courtesy of “Planning Christian Worship: Year C”. Joel J. Gawrisch, Author.

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