

Ash Wednesday07

In this Gospel the Lord is talking about the three traditional practices of Jewish faith: giving alms, prayer, and fasting. His message is to do all three secretly and not for show, not to be seen.

By this time in our lives most of us have our favorite charities. If we have neglected them, we might try during Lent to be more faithful in giving to them. But we also might look again at the charities to which we give. Today some of us pass over the charitable works of the Church and give instead to secular organizations such as Habitat or the American Cancer Society. These are good causes. But are we neglecting the charitable work of the Church both here and abroad? If so, Lent is the perfect time to correct that lapse.

Jesus tells us to pray. But he warns us that we should not pray in order to be seen by others. Yet here we are doing just that. But that is necessary. We are social creatures by nature. We have to pray as a community. But the Lord wants us to pray privately as well: "Go to your inner room, close the door and pray to your Father in secret." Why? So that we will do it for the right intention and not to be seen by others and praised by them. Here too there might be

need for work. Do we make time for private prayer in our daily lives? There should be moments when we do nothing but converse with God. Lent is the perfect time to check up on ourselves in this matter.

When we look at the Church's understanding of fasting (two small meals and one large one), I suspect that most of us can say that we are doing that already--or almost. The only challenge here might be in not eating between meals and not letting one of our small meals become too big. Using our rice bowls or something similar we can connect this practice with the hunger of the world. What could be more Christ-like than sharing our bread with others! This is the miracle which Jesus performed most frequently in the Gospels. How good it would be if we could make our eating habits part of our dedication to the eradication of hunger in the world today.

Our lives are a blank page. We write what we want to write on them. For the next forty days why not write these three things, giving, praying and fasting, on the page of our lives. They will give our lives focus. They will also give us much happiness, for, in the end, we are only happy when we are living in God's will, and

we live in God's will when we give alms, pray and share our bread with the hungry.