

Let us pray...

*Holy God, we have come to the beginning of another Lenten season. It is a joyous time of the year as we anticipate what comes at the end; Easter and that powerful reminder of God's amazing grace through the cross and resurrection of Jesus. For the time being, though, we enter a time of personal reflection, penitence and repentance. As we do this, oh God, may we be drawn closer to you. May we be renewed; for you are the reward which we have through your grace. Often this gets forgotten through distractions that Satan throws our way. May we meditate on Your Word and hear Your promises. Lead us to the cross and may we embrace the victory won for us there through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

We have just come through Ash Wednesday; a time of preparation. A personal time between you and God as you renew your appreciation for the treasure that is Jesus. This renewal time begins through a self-reflection on who you truly are; a sinner, whose penalty is death. We hear this through the imposition of ashes, *"Remember, from dust you came and to dust you shall return."* The ashes, though, are placed on the forehead in the shape of a cross; reminding people of the hope we have through Jesus.

Historically, in the 4th century after the legalization of Christianity, Lent was a time for baptismal preparation. Candidates for baptism fasted for 40 days, not including Sundays since they are feast days celebrating the resurrection. During their time of preparation, candidates would go through a time of catechesis culminating in their baptism on Easter. Our modern-day confirmation programs, in the Lutheran tradition at least, model this somewhat, minus the fasting part (I can't imagine that flying too well with middle schoolers). Today, confirmands go through a time of catechesis and preparation culminating in them affirming their baptisms; a service very similar to the baptism service. In both cases, the focus is on the gift from God (salvation) that comes through faith in Jesus by His grace. It is a personal time where candidates/confirmands encounter this gift and subsequently make public profession of their faith. A lot of similarities and those similarities continue to THIS day with you; those who have been baptized and maybe even confirmed. But whether you have been confirmed or not, baptized or not, this Lenten season is for you.

Therefore, I encourage you to embrace this time. Participate in a midweek Lenten worship service. Begin a new spiritual discipline like Bible reading, prayer, meditation, journaling or worship, to name a few. Discover or re-discover this gift of God through Jesus Christ. Call this season, if you will, a time of "catechesis" for yourself, culminating in the public profession that Jesus IS Lord and that He has risen. Draw closer to God, for the treasure that he secured through Jesus is a gracious gift all for you. No strings attached. You are a sinner, but Jesus is THE Savior. Amen and Amen.