**Ash Wednesday ABC Lectionary Catechesis**

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| Thus Lent begins. God desires conversion of heart; our Lenten practices are directed to that goal or end. At the same time, the three penances commended by Jesus are done for others who have less than we have ourselves; at any angle, penance has some communal character connected with it, cf. the prophet Joel. We live in a culture that privatizes religion. God is a separate if not remote part of our lives; God is spiritual and therefore not tangible, immanent, or incarnate. Lent is our drawing close to God, to suffering, and to transformation.  |

**FIRST READING: Joel 2, 12-18**

Joel worked at some time after the return from Exile in the late 5th century BC, and in the context of a drought and famine in the countryside. While there is a temple and its priests and liturgy, there is no mention of a king. The text consists basically of two speeches, using the agricultural crisis as an image of the Day of Lord, a time for a wake up call, and foreshadowing a great, divine harvest. The prophet calls to conversion and repentance in order to renew the covenant. All the people are convened from greatest to smallest.

**Vss. 12-13: CCC 1430** Jesus calls us to conversion and penance; the interior or spiritual work must precede the exterior work of fasting, mortification, self-denial and the like. Without the interior work of the Spirit, any external activity is “sterile.” Only the presence of interior conversion and penance can lead to exterior work or visible signs.

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| **KNOW YOUR****FAITH** | What is the spiritual gift of compunction, and why have we lost this in the modern world?What happens typically when exterior or visible work is not grounded in interior conversion?  |
| **LIVE YOUR****FAITH** | What does it mean for you to “rend your heart”?The prophet mentions some of the forms of penance. What would you add to his list? |
| **SHARE YOUR FAITH** | What role do you play in gathering the assembly of the church?In evangelizing, what is the stage of conversion? |
| **WORSHIP** | What part of the Mass is the prophet Joel possibly referring to?What can we possibly offer up to God as part of our worship for the healing and forgiving of sins? |

  **First Reading**

**RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 51, 3-4. 5-6. 12-13. 14. 17**

This Psalm will be used also on the first Sunday of Lent. The Miserere is the great penitential psalm of the seven (Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102,130, and 143) which shows the sinner expressing sorrow for sin. Some of the verses not included are a bit negative, for example, the conception of a person is in sin, not love as in vs. 7. The penitent person appears before God with nothing but for a renewed commitment to conversion of heart, the new and clean heart given by the Spirit. The penitent expresses the lack of anything else to give God, and disapproves of “do ut des” religion. God cannot be bought, counter to the teachings of prosperity religion in America.

**Vs. 6: CCC 431, 1850** “Sin is an offense against God.” We revolt against God, thinking to become “like God” for ourselves. We disobey God and think to judge for ourselves good from evil. “Sin is love of onself even to contempt of God,” wrote St. Augustine; hence his definition of sin as ***incorvata in se***, which is to say the ram’s horn turned in on its own head that eventually kills it.

**Vs. 12: CCC 298, 431** God gives new life to those dead in sin.

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| **KNOW YOUR****FAITH** | What is your definition of sin?What is the role of the Holy Spirit in reconciliation? |
| **LIVE YOUR****FAITH** | Name the prominent sins of our modern culture in the United States?What does a “steadfast spirit” and a “willing spirit” look like for you? |
| **SHARE YOUR FAITH** | Speech is one of the preeminent ways to evangelize. Share your thoughts on the last verse of the responsorial about the request for God to open your mouth to proclaim praise of God. What does it mean for you to praise God? |
| **WORSHIP** | God forgives sin. Why does the Church ritualize this in a sacrament? What are the other “penitential psalms”? |

 **Responsorial Psalm**

**SECOND READING: II Corinthians 5, 20 – 6, 2**

Just before this passage, vss. 18-19, the word “reconciliation” appears 4 of the 15 times it appears in the New Testament, so for us in the Precious Blood communities, this is a very important passage, to be read and understood in its full context. The titles in the Catechism for those who work in the Church color all the various workers in the Church with the ministry of reconciliation. The other emphasis here is the heightened urgency for this work, which is more true than ever in our own time of fear, hatred, and all the sins of the god Mammon.

**Vs. 20: CCC 859, 1424, 1442** The apostles were given a share in the mission of Jesus. The missionary mandate of the Church comes from Jesus and without him the Church cannot work. Hence the titles: servants, ministers, ambassadors, and stewards used in the epistles. The sacrament of confession both discloses the sins and at the same expresses confident faith in the God who forgives. It is also a sacrament of forgiveness and reconciliation. Christ gives this power to the Church from the Father. Absolution is a fundamental part of the apostolic ministry.

**Vs. 21: CCC 602 I Peter 1, 18-20** “You were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was destined before the foundation of the world but was made manifest at the end of the times for your sake.” Christ came in the state of fallen humanity so that “we might become the righteousness of God.”

**Vs. 2: CCC 1041** The announcement of a last judgment motivates us to forgiveness and reconciliation. The Day of the Lord inspires fear and a “blessed hope” for those found worthy and free of sin.

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| **KNOW YOUR****FAITH** | Explain the Catechisms understanding of the role of the Day of the Lord in the development and practice of ethics and morality.What is the core mission of the Church? |
| **LIVE YOUR****FAITH** | What’s your best rationale you can give to account for your faith?What contribution or gifts of self do you have to offer the reconciliation work of the Church? |
| **SHARE YOUR FAITH** | Our titles are servants, ministers, ambassadors and stewards. Most frequently we think of ourselves as ministers. How can we imagine ourselves under these other titles in the work of evangelization?St. Paul indicates that ambassadors implore, entreat, reconcile, and collaborate (“working together”). Reflect on these practices in light of evangelization? |
| **WORSHIP** | In light of this passage, share how the bow during the Creed at the words, “and he became man” is meaningful to you.At the end of the Eucharist, we are sent forth with these words, “Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your lives.” Share how you can make these words true in your life.  |

 **Second Reading**

**GOSPEL: Matthew 6, 1-6. 16-18 Jesus Teaches Authentic Prayer, Almsgiving, and Fasting**

**Chapter 6** opens with the saying opens with the main point for the three teachings that follow; actions are not performed for vainglory (from a Greek word meaning more literally “empty glory”) in other words, boasting about what one has done for the sake of being proud over others and showing off. The three teachings ends just after vs. 18 by repeating this motif; there calling attention to where one’s treasure is: right here and now in the esteem of others or in heaven in the fact of the Father. The teaching on prayer is slightly interrupted by the teaching of the Lord’s prayer. Note that the passage uses the pronoun “you”, not in the singular, but in the plural because Jesus is speaking to his disciples all at once. For example, you all of the Church go off in private to pray. These three actions (fasting, prayer, and almsgiving are corporate and communal acts; these acts should shape what it is that we will “give up for Lent.”

**Vss. 1-18: CCC 1434** Penance is expressed in many ways, not limited to prayer, fasting, and almsgiving taught by Jesus in this Gospel. The gift of compunction, acts of charity, invocation of the saints, and even martyrdom are acts of penance.

**Vss. 1-6: CCC 1430, 1969** cf. above for the first citation. Prayer, fasting, and almsgiving are acts directed to the Father.

**Vss. 2-4: CCC 1753, 2447 “**The end never justifies the means.” So good intentions that are fundamentally of bad origin and in carrying out the act do not make the result good. An innocent person cannot be killed to save others. Nor can an act of charity, boasted about to serve the honor of the actor, be a good act. The spiritual and corporal works of mercy, listed here. Charity is the primary purpose of these works performed to give glory to God, not the person doing them. These are pleasing to God.

**Vs. 2: CCC 1063** In Isaiah 65, 16 is “The God of Truth.” Jesus affirms the truth and promise of his teachings by repeating the affirmative, “Amen”, which can be translated as “Truly, truly, I say unto you.”

**Vs. 5: CCC 1063** Cf. above.

**Vs. 6: CCC 693, 2608, 2655, 2691** Jesus teaches the conversion of heart, reconciliation are necessary to present gifts at the altar. Prayer is also a requirement of this teaching. The heart that prays is open to receive the mysteries of salvation. The heart can be compared to an altar. Prayer of the heart receives, internalizes and assimilates the liturgy during and after the celebration. The church building as a sacred space is always a place of prayer, and this should be imitated in the domestic church. Centers of retreat, monasteries, pilgrimages also assist this sort of openness of heart in prayer.

**Vss. 16-18: 1430** Cf. above.

**Vs. 16: CCC 1063** Cf. above.

**Vs. 18: CCC 575** Jesus’ teachings were “a sign of contradiction” to the current religious authorities, whom he both challenged and in cases praised and endorsed.

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| **KNOW YOUR****FAITH** | Why does God asks us to do penance and what is penance, especially as a movement apart from conversion?Explain “The end never justifies the means” with concrete and real examples. |
| **LIVE YOUR****FAITH** | Name ways in which Christianity contradictions cultural attitudes and practices today. How do you plan to pray, fast, and give alms during this coming Lent? |
| **SHARE YOUR FAITH** | How can you give witness, while avoiding the pitfalls noted by Jesus, to your family and all that Lent is a very important season for you?What are the charities that you contribute to and why, especially the ones you’ve chosen for this season of Lent? |
| **WORSHIP** | How do conversion of heart and penance prepare us for the Eucharist?Does your domestic church have an “altar” and then describe it?  |

 **Gospel**