

The Episcopal Church of Saints Andrew and Matthew

OUR LITURGY UNFOLDED: CARNIVAL, ASH WEDNESDAY AND LENT

At SsAM, the last Sunday after the Epiphany is **Carnival Sunday (February 11)**. At the 10:30 liturgy we, on the threshold of Lent, worship with great festivity in the spirit of the Mardi Gras and Caribbean Carnival traditions. In this joy-filled and yet solemn celebration of song, word, prayer and Eucharist, we give thanks for the transforming power of God's love in Christ. Then, with uplifted spirits, we embark upon the profoundly spiritual journey of Lent.

Shrove Tuesday (**February 13**) may be best known for the pancake/waffle supper, but is actually a time of preparation for Lent and is when the ashes used for Ash Wednesday are prepared. **Ash Wednesday (February 14)**, a major holy day, is a time when some people chose to fast. Whether you fast or not, it is a time to reflect on a "new beginning with God." It is a time when we can pause and take stock of how we are doing on our journey as Christians. Ash Wednesday is a time of "inner authenticity not outward show."

The *Gospel of Matthew* reminds us that "whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others they are fasting." (Matthew 6.16). *A Priest's Handbook* reminds us that "The act of receiving ashes is not a focal point of the day, but is a sign of the penitential beginning of the season of Lent.

LENT, a penitential period beginning on Ash Wednesday and ending on **Easter (March 31)**, is a time when we prepare ourselves to walk with Jesus during Holy Week when we observe his betrayal, execution and resurrection. The term Lent comes from an Old English word meaning "spring." Lent is traditionally described as lasting for forty days, in commemoration of the forty days which, according to the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, Jesus spent, before beginning his public ministry, fasting in the desert, after which he endured temptation by the Devil.

"Lent is often a time of self-examination, fasting, penitence and spiritual discipline." For some, Lent is a time of giving up something, but increasingly, it is hoped that you consider taking on something that will deepen your understanding of what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Sundays are omitted in counting the 40 days between Ash Wednesday and Easter. It has been said that this is because Sundays commemorate the day of Christ's resurrection and are, therefore, not fasting days. We also say farewell to saying "alleluia" which is not used again until Easter Day.

In the liturgy for the **1st Sunday in Lent**, you will find that the liturgy includes The Great Litany, an intercessory prayer including various petitions with fixed responses by the congregation. Used as early as the fifth century in Rome, the Litany was the first English language rite prepared by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer. It was first published in 1544.

When we use this Litany, we do not pray the Prayers of the People. While steeped in history, several of the petitions reflect the concerns and issues of our current lives. Such is the case with this petition which we added: *That it may please thee for the leaders to find the will for peace in Jerusalem, the ancestral and spiritual home of all of us who are the children of Abraham so that peace in that City will spread among her children everywhere.* We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.

Quotations are from *Times and Seasons*, 2008 by Richard Giles, Former Dean, Philadelphia Cathedral

Beginning with the 2nd Sunday in Lent, **The Decalogue** is part of the opening of our liturgy. As Richard Giles says, the penitential rite "is no mere vain repetition, but an authentic and meaningful act of making our peace with God. We pause at the threshold of worship to petition a gracious God...and we come in sorrow for all the ways we manage to make a mess of things, yet in hope, aware of God's endless mercy. We pray that broken relationships be restored and we be allowed to start all over again." (*Times and Seasons*, pp. 83-4). The Ten Commandments (Decalogue) are essentially a summary of the 613 commandments contained in the Old Testament Law. The first four commandments deal with our relationship with God. The last six commandments deal with our relationships with one another. The Ten Commandments are recorded in the Bible in Exodus 20:1- 17 and Deuteronomy 5:6-21.

THE DECALOGUE

Hear the commandments of God to his people:

I am the Lord your God who brought you out of bondage.

You shall have no other gods but me.

Amen. Lord have mercy.

You shall not make for yourself any idol.

Amen. Lord have mercy.

You shall not invoke with malice the Name of the Lord your God.

Amen. Lord have mercy.

Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy.

Amen. Lord have mercy.

Honor your father and your mother.

Amen. Lord have mercy.

You shall not commit murder.

Amen. Lord have mercy.

You shall not commit adultery.

Amen. Lord have mercy.

You shall not steal.

Amen. Lord have mercy.

You shall not be a false witness.

Amen. Lord have mercy.

You shall not covet anything that belongs to your neighbor.

Amen. Lord have mercy.

Jesus said, "The first commandment is this: Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is the only Lord. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:29-31)