



Ash Wednesday **February 14, 2018**

Selected reading: Joel 2:12-14

“Even now, says the LORD, return to me with your whole heart, with fasting, and weeping, and mourning. Rend your hearts, not your garments, and return to the LORD, your God. For gracious and merciful is he, slow to anger, rich in kindness, and relenting in punishment.”

Today, it begins. Spring Training, that is. Like many in this town, I’m a big baseball guy. Sitting on a roof, a patio, or a porch on a warm summer night, with the voices of Mike Shannon, John Rooney, and Mike Claiborne coming through the radio, accompanied by family or a good friend... to me, that’s a beautiful thing. But before Opening Day comes the workouts and training, a time of intentional preparation. A time to iron out the kinks and rust that accumulated over the offseason. To develop a team approach and a new sense of cohesion in the clubhouse. It’s the beginning of a new season, where the sins and goats of last year are forgiven, and hope springs eternal.

Today’s Scripture readings beckon us to a different kind of training. Ash Wednesday challenges Christians to prepare our minds and hearts for re-encountering the Paschal Mystery. If Easter is Jesus’ ultimate triumph over death and the chains of sin, the beginning of Lent invites us to become aware of the ways we are broken and in need of God’s mercy. Receiving the ashes as we do, we are reminded of our own humanity, one where we are in desperate need of God’s merciful rain. Today, the Lord God calls us to turn back home.

This Lent, I ask for the grace of silence in the midst of my days, a silence that beckons me to more deeply consider the ever-present divine mysteries and who God is calling me to become. May God fill the quiet of my heart.

God, you are my refuge and my strength, an ever-present help in times of trouble. I do not fear, though the earth shakes and the mountains quake. You, the Lord of hosts, are with me. Help me to be still and know that you are God. You are with me. Help me to be still.

-Mr. Brian Gilmore, Campus Ministry and Theology Departments