

## Ash Wednesday

**“Actions have consequences” is one of the life lessons I remember even from my high school years. At an age when I enjoyed doing things I enjoyed doing, I had to learn that some of my choices made life difficult for other people and diminished my life. If I wasted time instead of studying, if I ate unhealthy food, if I let other people get under my skin, if I didn’t trust my parents with an honest report of my day, my actions had consequences. I learned from my mistakes.**

**On Ash Wednesday we come before God to face the two most serious realities of our lives: sin and death. We admit we have made bad choices, so we come to plead for God’s mercy. Life does not last forever, so we remember we are dust and unto dust we shall return. We do not have unlimited time to repent. The need is urgent. We repent of our sin before death makes its claim.**

**Often we do not commit to self-improvement until we experience self-failure. The goals we don’t reach inspire us to change our approach and try again. Consequences can help retool our actions. Many penitents confess the consequences of their sin. They know it’s wrong to lose their temper, for example, but when they see the negative effects on the rest of their family, the consequences of their actions spur them to change.**

**Self-improvement seems focused on the self, but it actually benefits others. When we improve our lives, we improve the lives of those around us.**

**This lies behind Saint Paul’s admonition to the Corinthians - and to us - in today’s second reading. He wants us to be reconciled to God, but not for our own selfish sake. “We are ambassadors for Christ,” he says, “as if God were appealing through us.” We may feel unworthy to bring Christ to the world, but Paul says God has equipped us for this. Paul declares with a very difficult phrase that God made Christ, who did not know sin, “to be sin” for our sake. He probably means that Christ became human for our sake, as sin is a defining part of humanity - though Christ remained without personal sin. God did this, Paul says, “so that we might become the righteousness of God” in Christ. God equips us this grace. Paul appeals to us “not to receive the grace of God in vain.” In spite of our sin, Christ became one like us so that we might become ambassadors for him.**

**The consequence of this action is not merely self-improvement, but the salvation of the world.**

**Today we acknowledge our personal sin and face the reality of impending death. Today’s action is repentance. The consequences are even greater than we may imagine. We will become better ambassadors for Christ. You will be Christ for your family. You will represent the gospel at your workplace. You will inspire classmates to repent as well. God has given us all we need in Christ. Let us not receive the grace of God in vain. Let’s use it. This Lent, let us repent so that we can be Christ for the world.**