

## Ash Wednesday

The coincidence of Ash Wednesday and Valentine's Day was destined to cause problems. How do two Catholics feast on champagne and chocolate when they're supposed to observe fast and abstinence? It seems unfair. This is supposed to be a day of repentance, not a day of cruelty.

This got more complicated when Kansas City set aside the same day to celebrate back to back Super Bowl victories. It would have made more sense to us if the people in charge had scheduled the parade a day earlier on Mardi Gras. Instead, we got a taste of Easter joy on Ash Wednesday—like the apostles witnessing the Transfiguration, who got a taste of the joy yet to come before they walked back down the mountain into daily life. That joy has been marred by a horrific shooting in a crowd of people celebrating a magnificent human achievement. It only shows how much we humans, even at our best, still fail before the eyes of God.

Valentine's Day for some makes an appropriate coincidence with Ash Wednesday. It celebrates love, but, for many husbands, it is also a day of repentance. If they have offended their wife throughout the year, they can reset the relationship on Valentine's Day, humbly showing how important she is to him.

As such, this is a good day to launch Lent. We show our relationship with God especially by coming to church for the ashes of repentance and the holy communion of love. We enter this time of year and announce to God, "We get it. We get that we have sinned, yet you out of love sent your Son to save us. To prepare for Easter, we accept practices that show we admit we sin, we are sorry we sin, and we plan to do something about our sin."

St. Paul tells the Corinthians something similar: "Be reconciled to God." He also tells them—and us—something more: "We are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us." It falls on us to tell the world about the love of Christ, and to summon the world to a humble response, one that puts violence aside.

Lent calls for interior renewal. Many of the penances we adopt are private matters that others may not even know. Some people like to give alms in secret. They make charitable gifts anonymously so as humbly not to draw attention to themselves, and, practically, not to attract a lot of other people asking them for the same.

Lent can also be a time of exterior renewal. By publicly wearing our ashes, we let people know that the spiritual life matters to us. We can share the good news of Christ more broadly by inviting someone to church the way we invite them to football games. This is becoming an ambassador for Christ.

I hope the Chiefs win the Super Bowl for the next five consecutive years. That would make Patrick Mahomes the winningest quarterback in history. He would reach that achievement in the year 2029, when, believe it or not, Ash Wednesday falls again on Valentine's Day. Maybe by that time we can be such good ambassadors for Christ that the mayor will schedule the parade on Tuesday. And guns will be silent.