

REVERENCE IN THE PRESENCE OF THE MAJESTIC AND DIVINE

Grace to all of you, and peace having been multiplied in deep knowledge of the God and of Jesus the Lord of us.

And so, our homily for this Ash Wednesday begins with an Apostolic blessing.

There is a public-service (liturgical) reason that pastors often pause after declaring such words over the congregations before them. We are moved by a godly desire that you actually receive those words and treasure the gifts they bear into your ears, hearts and minds.

The words from which today's Epistolary greeting translation was drawn have been proclaimed on occasion from the late 2nd and early 3rd centuries by pastor — bishops/deacons/called lectors/appointed readers publicly reading II Peter. Over the next couple of centuries, the Letter's church use grew. It was fully accepted into the canon of Scripture by all the existing Christian Churches of the late 5th and early 6th centuries.

That last historical reality means that Peter's words which bestow God's grace and peace have been regularly declared into the ears of God's people for 1,510 years! Through them, generations of the faithful have heard that God has multiplied His grace and peace in the faithful who believe in the sin-covering and eternal life giving work of His Son and our Lord, Jesus the Christ. (That is another reason pastors pause after proclaiming an epistolary opening. We do so to give you all the chance to boldly

and confidently receive God's gifts with a firm, "Amen." Such declaration and assent are more than a mere liturgical formula, they, by God's grace grant the treasures they promise)!

As today's greeting closes, Peter, century after Christian century, continues to indicate that God's grace and peace are compounded in full and intimate knowledge of the eternal Father and Son. This Ash Wednesday service has followed a faithful order that, by design and practice, moved you to be ready to give your "So shall it be!" to this day's Apostolic words of blessing. From the opening sentence of the Pastoral address, you have been encouraged into entering this season of lengthening days with "prayerful and penitential reflection." Each section of the public service has reminded you of God's mercy in sending His Son to bear your sins, to grant us His grace. We have each and all implored Him to help us, hear us, and have mercy upon us.

Then in a very powerful rite, one which has been recovered in Bible-believing congregations who hold to the confessions of the *Book of Concord* as true and right in all they hold forth, you have received on your person the sign of the cross. You were reminded of the element from which the first man was created, and on account of sin and those you have added thereto, the element to which your body will return. Then, in a reminder of Christ's resurrection from the dead, you heard that your body, which on this day bears the mark of Christ's victory over sin and death with the ashes from last year's Palm Sunday fronds, will be raised from the dust by Him.

If that were not enough to bring you to reflection and repentance, the Word of God which began and ran through your Confession and God's Absolution was proclaimed. Jesus' blood-bought forgiveness was declared by Him, through His human messenger, to each one of you.

Then, as forgiven sinners, you cried out following the lead of a man called to open the Service of the Word. You were given to say to the Lord of Creation, "Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me... ." How powerful that entrance into the proclaimed Word for the Day was!

If that weren't sufficient to move you into penitential reflection, the Kyrie was to flow forth from your lips. Our collective prayer to the Triune God for mercy for all people in this fallen world was chanted. You implored God for His grace and peace to people who do not know Him in Christ Jesus, who cannot rightly pray for themselves. Yes, this is truly a day, a gift to the Church, for remembering how much we each and all need God's grace and peace.

Words, from the Word, have been, and are being declared – through proclamation and response. They are given to move you to genuine reverence in the Presence of all that is majestic and divine in worship and life. That is not emotional, intellectual or spiritual manipulation. It is simply the powerful Word of God working His will in and among you/us. Even now, II Peter continues proclaiming God's Word. He is calling out to you, the Church, saying in one long sentence (of only five sentences

that seem to appear in this section of the Greek text), that God and our Lord Jesus:

His Divine power has given (as gifts) all the things pertaining to life and godliness, through the deep knowledge of the One having called us by His own glory and excellence, through which the honorable and magnificent things for us (as) promises have been given, in order that through these things you all may become partakers of Divine nature, (being) ones (who) have escaped completely the corruption (that is) in the cosmos by strong (sinful) desires.¹

The post-blessing Word for Ash Wednesday declares the manner in which God grants the intimate knowledge of Him which multiplies peace and grace in us. The Letter declares that deep understanding of the things of God comes as gifts. He declares those to be all things He reveals for this life and godliness. Those, then He gives through His chosen means of grace. Those treasures are given by Him Who has called us on account of His own glory and virtues.

The Word continues to declare that all we have of God's grace and peace are gifts from Him. That means they are not earned by us. For if they were, they would be wages, not presents from our Father. He, through Peter, calls these Divine presents honorable and magnificent promises. (Reflect again on the words of the Rite of the Imposition of Ashes)....

He goes on to declare that His promises lead you into becoming partakers of the Divine Nature. That is, by God's grace, in His peace, you are declare to be holy as He is holy. God's fulfilling His promises means that you are named sinless as He is

¹ II Peter 1:3-4.

sinless. (The Word, again, returns us to Holy Baptism and Holy Absolution – all God’s Work, all gift to you).

Through the Word, the Holy Spirit reminds you that, in the Son, through the Father’s mercy that you have already escaped the corruption that is in this fallen world through sin. God has given to you the way out from the decay – moral, physical, spiritual, eternal – into which you, by virtue of Adam’s sin, were born He carried that corruption on His sinless Person into the grave. He rose from the grave that you might be free to daily rise from the death of sin. In Baptism, He gives you His divine power to live before God as ones whom He continues to turn away from strong desires which lead back to corruption, decay, eternal death. To ones freed from bondage to sin, death and hell itself, God declares:

Now, for this very reason, bring in every effort in the Faith of all of you, to outfit with complete supply: the virtue; and in the virtue, the knowledge; and in the knowledge, the self-control; and in the self-control, the long-suffering; and in the long-suffering, the godliness; and in the godliness, the brotherly love; and in the brotherly love, the sacrificial love.²

As people completely freed by the grace of God from the corruption in this cosmos, you are liberated for godly living. That means you are, in Christ, actually able to live as one being in the Faith. God has given to all of you His complete supply of virtue, knowledge, self-control, patient endurance, godliness, brotherly love and sacrificial love. As you remain in His good and peaceful gifts, He works such in and

² II Peter 1:5-7.

through you.

Each of you has been given God's gifts, to differing degrees for sure. Yet, as you are joined to one another through God's means of grace, He brings His gifts together for the good of all—here, out there, around the world. At the center of those gifts—following from a recent Sunday sermon—is the divine present of long-suffering, steadfastness, or patient endurance. Such are ways of translating that which God Himself, in Christ Jesus, completely and perfectly practices.

If you take a moment later to look over the seven traits that God grants to those who believe in Him in Jesus, you will discover they all are perfectly found in Christ. As you are one with Him through Baptism, you are free to live in those seven godly gifts. If you have not been, you have 40 special days to return to them, all the while confessing your sins and receiving God's gift of forgiveness.

That is good to reflect upon this Lententide, as we all fast from the "Glorias" and "Alleluias" of God's services. Lent, after all, is not about that which you might give up in prayerful and penitential reflection. (You are free to fast—from food or drink, from things you enjoy—just keep that between you and God, please)! Truly, Lent is about remembering that which God gave up for you—His very life in the Person of the Son—that He might give you the greatest of gifts—the multiplication of His blood-bought peace through His grace.

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Ash Wednesday Evening (LSB One-year series)

Psalm 51:1-13; Joel 2:12-19; II Peter 1:2-11; Matthew 6:16-21

February 10, 2016

Pastor Michael A. Morehouse

Soli Deo Gloria

(2nd draft, lit.) As One Who all things to us of the Divine power of Him, the things as to life and godliness having been given (as gifts) through the deep knowledge of the One having called us for His own glory and to virtue, through which the honorable things and magnificent things for us promises have been given, that through these things you all may become Divine partakers of nature, ones having escaped completely of the one in the cosmos by strong desires of corruption.³

³ *II Peter* 1:3-4.