
Dear People Of God:

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
by the Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler,
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The first Christians observed with great devotion the days of our Lord's passion and resurrection, and it became the custom of the Church to prepare for them by a season of penitence and fasting. This season of Lent provided a time in which converts to the faith were prepared for Holy Baptism. It was also a time when those who, because of notorious sins, had been separated from the body of the faithful were reconciled by penitence and forgiveness, and restored to the fellowship of the Church. Thereby, the whole congregation was put in mind of the message of pardon and absolution set forth in the gospel of our Savior, and of the need which all Christians continually have to renew their repentance and faith.

I invite you, therefore, in the name of the Church, to the observance of holy lent, by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating of God's holy Word. And to make a right beginning of repentance, and as a mark of our mortal nature, let us now kneel before the Lord, our maker and redeemer. (From the Ash Wednesday service, Book of Common Prayer, pages 264-265).

At that point on Ash Wednesday, hundreds of us knelt in silence. Then we made our way to the altar rail to receive an ashen smudge on our foreheads. The priest said, "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

Whether or not you were at church on Ash Wednesday, the Church still calls each of us to holy Lent. Some of us will deny ourselves something we normally enjoy: chocolate maybe, or alcohol, or even television. This is not a new diet, at least not for our bodies. This discipline is to remind us that we don't need all that we think we need. Every time I yearn, during Lent, for what I have given up, that yearning is an opportunity to consider God instead.

Others of us take on a Lenten discipline. We determine to read a special book, or we renew a regimen of daily prayer, or we serve the poor in a special way. Or, we discipline ourselves in some household way, renewing our ordinary relationships. There are all sorts of Lenten disciplines.

As always, I urge folks to renew their relationship to Church itself during this holy season. Lent is a countercultural season. Our culture says consume some more, buy another car, another television, another house, go out of town every weekend, spend Spring Break in some exotic locale, and you will be satisfied. The Church says pay attention to your spiritual life, right where you are. Pay attention to prayer. Slow down. Return to a right relationship with God.

The Church has her problems, but we also have traditions that return us to holiness. Dear people of God: I invite you to the observance of a holy Lent.

Sam Candler signature



The Very Rev. Sam Candler

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