

March 5, 2025, Ash Wednesday

***Don't just exist but live* by Pastor Julio Romero**

Gospel: Matthew 6:1-21

Today marks the beginning of Lent, a journey of forty spiritual days— a season of renewal, discipline, and prayer. We can refer to this Lenten season as a time of spiritual cleansing. For the next forty days, we will closely examine our relationship with God, with others, and with ourselves.

The Gospel reading today addresses these areas. Jesus provides us with a path to grow and nurture a right relationship with Him. He begins by speaking about acts of charity. He says, *'So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.'*

Think about what the Lord says: for Him, it is a given that we practice charity, show care for those less fortunate, and avoid being selfish or self-centered. He is not questioning, “Are you generous? Are you your brother’s keeper?” No, He believes in us. He believes that those who follow Him care about their brothers and sisters, their neighbors. Jesus is reminding us that God knows about all the good things we do, and that should truly matter to us.

Next, Jesus speaks about our prayer life. Once again, He is counting on our prayerful discipline, on our trust and communication with God, on sharing with God our most personal stories, concerns, gratitude, and everything else that is important to us. Why would Jesus want us to pray? I find the answer in Psalm 118, which says:

*In my distress I cried out to the LORD.
The LORD answered me and put me in a wide open place.
The LORD is on my side; I am not afraid.
What can people do to me?
The LORD is on my side as my helper.
I look in triumph on those who hate me.
It is better to take shelter in the LORD
than to trust in people.
It is better to take shelter in the LORD
than to trust in rulers.*

More and more, we realize that it is becoming harder to trust in rulers or what the world offers. But despite all that, God remains our constant refuge. He is the trustworthy friend who is always by our side. Prayer and trust in Him bring healing, hope, guidance, and a close relationship with Him.

Finally, Jesus talks about fasting. What do we need to fast from? I want to give an answer beyond the idea of simply giving up food. At the end of this Gospel, Jesus says:

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal."

Here, the Lord Jesus is saying that we need to fast from earthly things that are temporary and instead feed on those things that are eternal. The world doesn't need more materialistic, greedy people—it seems we already have enough of them. Instead, what the world needs are people who know compassion, who know generosity, and who put people first, with material gains and goods second or last.

Let's remember what the Lord said: *"Watch out and guard yourself from all types of greed, because one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."*

The celebration of Ash Wednesday is a reminder that time is not our friend, that our days are numbered, and that we need to live a life that is meaningful, one that counts for something. And that something is a life of service to God and others because our existence here is quite limited.

Someone once said:

"I would rather be ashes than dust. I would rather that my spark should burn out in a brilliant blaze than be stifled by dry rot. I would rather be a superb meteor, every atom of me in magnificent glow, than a sleepy and permanent planet. The proper function of me is to live, not to exist. I shall not waste my days in trying to prolong them. I shall use my time."

During the next forty days, let us carry that spark within us—the spark of God's love, the spark of generosity, a prayerful life, repentance, and good deeds that bring so much meaning, so that we don't just exist but truly live. **Amen.**