

**1Lenten Journey – The Lord’s Prayer
Reference to Our Father, but basically Ashes
Ash Wednesday, February 25, 2009
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When I was in college I took a course in Logic. One rule of logic is the Law of Proportion. If an author writes 100 pages on a subject and ten pages on another subject, he desires that the one with 100 pages gets the most attention.

We have less than four chapters in the Gospels on the Christmas story. We have only one verse for over half of the life of Jesus. By contrast one-third of the Gospels deal with one week in the life of Jesus. Today we begin that season which gets more coverage in the four Gospels of the New Testament than any other.

The first day of the Lenten season is called Ash Wednesday. The word “ashes” is used to indicate repentance and mourning and sorrow for sin. He repented in sackcloth and ashes. Lord, I am sorry for my sin.

This sorrow for sin is the basic attitude of the Lenten season. Does Jesus forgive all sin and all sinners? We rather quickly say “yes,” but the Bible makes it very clear that the Great Physician cannot heal those who do not need healing. If, however, we confess our sins, says 1 John, “Jesus is faithful and willing to forgive.” After that, if we say we have not sinned, we make God a liar and his truth is not in us.

Which leads us to say something else about ashes. Ashes are the remnant of fire. Fire is sometimes used symbolically for purification. I can remember, especially as a child, when my mother would use a needle to take out a sliver. But what did she do before injecting it into our body? She took a match and purified the sharp end with fire.

The book of Malachi, which is sung so beautifully in Handel’s “Messiah” says, “He will purify the sons of Levi.”

We can now ask, “What makes it possible for Jesus to be our forgiver, our Savior, our Redeemer?” The Lord’s Prayer begins, “Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.” Luther wrote the profound explanation to the second article of the Apostles’ Creed. Jesus is true God and true man.

God is our Father. He is truly human. He is also heavenly. He is divine. He is truly human to understand our human situation which includes sin. He is truly divine so that he is untainted by sin and died the innocent for the guilty. He forgives sin of thought, word, and deed. He forgives the sin we have done and the sin when we fail to positively do his will.

When the cross of ashes is imposed today, it means two things. It means that Christ forgives the sin we have done and failed to do. It means that Christ is ready, willing, and able to forgive. Thanks be to God. Amen.