

Lent a time of repentance for community, too

written by Bishop Anthony B. Taylor |

Bishop Anthony B. Taylor delivered this homily Feb. 26.

Today is Ash Wednesday and our readings today remind us that there is both an individual and a communal dimension to Lent. Usually we focus mainly — maybe even exclusively — on the individual dimension.

In our Gospel today Jesus gives instructions about how we should carry out the righteous deeds of almsgiving, prayer and fasting. We should do all of these things in secret and our heavenly Father who sees what is done in secret will repay us.

There is both an individual and a communal dimension to Lent.

But there is also a communal dimension to Lent that we usually overlook. Notice what Scripture has to say in our first reading today. It is all in the plural and all out in public: “Blow the trumpet in Zion! Proclaim a fast, call an assembly; gather the people, notify the congregation ... and say, ‘Spare, O Lord, your people, and make not your heritage a reproach’ ... then the Lord was stirred to concern for his land and took pity on his people.”

Today, as we begin these 40 days of personal repentance, personal prayer, fasting and almsgiving, personal preparation for Easter, let us not forget the communal dimension: all the evils of which we need to repent as a Church and as a nation. In the Lord’s Prayer we don’t say “forgive me my trespasses” as if devotion is merely a private matter. We say “forgive us our trespasses” as a community, and not just sins of which we are conscious, but even trespasses, ways in which we have strayed, perhaps without even knowing it.

Ways in which we as a Church and as a nation have simply been blind. And for this to be forgiven, we have to forgive those other people who have trespassed against us, stepped on our toes, done things we don’t like — including the actions of other groups within society and the actions of other countries.

Today is Ash Wednesday and our readings today remind us that there is both an individual and a communal dimension to Lent. Let us pray, fast and give alms in secret, and let us do what we can to call our society to repentance of all the evils that afflict us as a nation.