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God calls everyone urgently to repent

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READINGS
Ps.130

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, as we gather on this sacred Ash Wednesday, we embark on the season of Lent, a time of reflection, repentance, and preparation for the glorious celebration of Easter. The ashes we receive tonight symbolize our mortality and our need for repentance. Our theme for reflection is clear: God calls everyone urgently to repent. What does this call mean, and how can we respond in a way that honours our Creator?

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent, a period of forty days (excluding Sundays) leading up to Easter. The ashes applied to our foreheads in the shape of a cross serve as a visible reminder of our mortality and the call to repentance. This ancient practice connects us to the biblical tradition where ashes symbolized sorrow for sins and a desire for God's mercy.

Joel 2.12-17 – The Call to Return to the Lord

In the book of Joel, we hear a powerful call to repentance. The prophet urges the people to return to the Lord with all their hearts, with fasting, weeping, and mourning. God's call is not one of mere ritual but a profound transformation of the inner self. Imagine a traveller who has lost their way, and a guide calls out with urgency, offering directions to safety. Similarly, God's call to repentance is a loving invitation to turn from the wrong path and embrace the way of life.

Psalm 130 – Out of the Depths, I Cry to You

The psalmist, in Psalm 130, voices a cry from the depths, acknowledging the reality of human frailty and the assurance of God's forgiveness. In our repentance, we cry out, trusting that God hears our pleas and redeems us. Consider a deep, dark well from which we cannot escape. God's mercy is the rope lowered into that well, rescuing us from the depths of our sins. As we repent, we grasp onto the lifeline of God's grace.

2 Corinthians 5.20-6.2 – Be Reconciled to God

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul emphasizes our role as ambassadors for Christ, imploring others to be reconciled to God. The urgency of repentance is highlighted, reminding us that now is the favorable time, now is the day of salvation. Imagine a mediator bringing estranged parties back together. In the same way, through Christ, we are reconciled to God. Our repentance is the bridge that spans the gap between our brokenness and God's abundant grace.

Luke 13.1-9 – The Parable of the Fig Tree

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus shares the parable of the barren fig tree, illustrating God's patience but also the urgency of bearing fruit. The call to repentance is an acknowledgment of God's mercy, yet it carries the responsibility of a transformed life. Consider a tree that, despite receiving care and attention, remains unfruitful. God's call to repentance is an invitation to cultivate the soil of our

hearts, allowing the seeds of righteousness to grow and bear abundant fruit.

The urgent call to repentance is rooted in the character of God. He is both just and merciful, desiring that none should perish but all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). Repentance is not a burdensome taskmaster but a pathway to restoration and communion with our Creator.As we contemplate the call to repentance, let us recognize it as an expression of God’s great love for us. It is an invitation to turn away from sin, embrace His mercy, and walk in the light of His grace. The ashes on our foreheads are not a mark of condemnation but a symbol of hope, a signpost pointing us toward reconciliation and renewal.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, on this Ash Wednesday, we humbly come before You, acknowledging our need for repentance and Your boundless mercy. As we journey through Lent, may our hearts be open to the transformative power of Your grace. Lord, grant us the courage to turn away from our sins and embrace the path of righteousness. May the urgency of Your call resonate in our hearts, leading us to a deeper relationship with You. In times of weakness, be our strength; in moments of despair, be our hope.

As we leave this place, may Your peace go with us, and may the season of Lent be a time of profound spiritual growth. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior, we pray.

Amen.