

Fr. Nick Dant's Homily, Saint Matthew Catholic Church, Indianapolis
Ash Wednesday, Feb. 17, 2021, Cycle B

The Lord says: "...return to me with your whole heart...Rend your hearts, not your garments, and return to the Lord, your God."

What God asks of us through the Prophet Joel is the same thing Jesus asks of us in the Gospel passage from Matthew -- that we seek a deep interior transformation, that we grow deeper in our conversion to the Lord.

Lent after Lent, the prophet Joel calls on us on Ash Wednesday to "proclaim a fast, to weep and mourn," and Jesus calls on us to give alms, pray and fast; but both the prophet Joel and Jesus warn against doing religious acts in order to make others think we are reforming, when, in fact, all we are doing is going through the outward motions.

God is interested in only one thing -- our true interior conversion to His ways. Does this mean that Joel and Jesus are demanding perfection of us -- not at all! However, we are being asked to be sincere and honest about our efforts at interior transformation.

In baptism, we Christians made a promise to walk in the footsteps of Jesus and to live the gospel in our lives. Obviously, none of us succeeds in fully living out our baptism. We know we always need to grow deeper in our conversion -- become more other and God centered in our lives.

Lent is our time to renew ourselves in our baptism, as the catechumens walk the journey to baptism. While the catechumens seek conversion, we the already baptized seek deeper conversion.

During Lent, then, we accept Jesus' invitation to fast, pray and give alms -- not for show -- but as the pathways to rending our hearts -- to deeper interior conversion to Jesus and His gospel!