Ash Wednesday
Rolling Meadows - 1977

Rev. Carl F. Thrun

IN NOMINE JESU

ST. MATTHEW 6: 1-8; 16-18 (TLB)

The Gospel Lesson for this Ash Wednesday talks about the PARADING OF RELIGION. "TAKE CARE! DON'T DO YOUR GOOD DEEDS PUBLICLY, TO BE ADMIRED, FOR THEN YOU WILL LOSE THE REWARD FROM YOUR FATHER IN HEAVEN. WHEN YOU GIVE A GIFT TO A BEGGAR, DON'T SHOUT ABOUT IT AS THE HYPOCRITES DO -- BLOWING TRUMPETS IN THE SYNAGOGUES AND STREETS TO CALL ATTENTION TO THEIR ACTS OF CHARITY! I TELL YOU IN ALL EARNESTNESS, THEY HAVE RECEIVED ALL THE REWARD THEY WILL EVER GET. ..... WHEN YOU PRAY, DON'T BE LIKE THE HYPOCRITES WHO RETEND PIETY BY PRAYING PUBLICLY ON STREET CORNERS AND IN THE SYNAGOGUES WHERE EVERYONE CAN SEE THEM. TRULY, THAT IS ALL THE REWARD THEY WILL EVER GET ..... WHEN YOU FAST, DECLINING YOUR FOOD FOR A SPIRITUAL PURPOSE, DON'T DO IT PUBLICLY AS THE HYPOCRITES DO, WHO TRY TO LOOK PALE AND DISHEVELED SO PEOPLE WILL FEEL SORRY FOR THEM. TRULY, THAT IS THE ONLY REWARD THEY WILL EVER GET."

Now I grant you that all of us like to be RECOGNIZED and APPRECIATED -- and there may be nothing wrong with that. We even teach our children to say "Thank you" for favors and kindnesses from others -- and we ourselves may be rightly hurt when others "take for granted" our favors and kindnesses to them without even so much as a "Thank you." ..... But JESUS is saying: "Don't parade your religion!" That is, "Don't seek any admiration or applause. You may'HAVE IT ' ALL RIGHT, but don't FLAUNT IT!"

Now YOU KNOW and I KNOW some VERY RELIGIOUS PEOPLE who do like to "FLAUNT IT!" They are SO PIOUS and SO POMPOUS and SO PERFECT that you begin to wonder if they are "for real." The "halo" over their head is SO INTACT that you are sure it could NEVER FAL OFF -- and you begin to ask yourself, "If I stuck so-and-so with a pin, I wonder if he or she would bleed?" ..... Have you ever run across such-an-one? (such a person) I KNOW I HAVE! ..... But when is the last time YOU have looked in the MIRROR? I mean it, ISN'T THAT IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER A DESCRIPTION OF YOU?

Many of us come from TRADITIONAL BACKGROUNDS where LENT was SUPERIMPOSED upon us by WHAT WE COULD EAT - or WHERE WE COULD GO - and WHAT WE COULD OR COULDN'T DO..... As I think back, I do not have GOOD MEMORIES of LENT from my childhood. I remember spending most of my time TRYING TO FEEL GUILTY about things for which I WAS NOT GUILTY --- and pretty soon I was FEELING GUILTY FOR NOT FEELING GUILTY..... Of course, that is a MISUSE of LENT -- but I'M sure there are a lot of people who feel they are not observing LENT unless they are FEELING BADLY.

As I say, LENT for me was a bad time in my childhood. Even if you didn't FEEL sorrowful, or guilty, or depressed --- YOU HAD TO FAKE IT, YOU HAD TO PRETEND! And isnt't that what this text is talking about. Nevertheless, I remember vividly how some of us we "cutting up" and having a "really good time" in class one day -- and our teacher

raised his voice and scolded: "Don't you know it is LENT? When Jesus goes to the Cro and suffers and dies -- how can you be so happy?" And, of course, we all put on our "sober faces" and felt VERY, VERY GUILTY..... It was only later -- MUCH LATER -- that I learned WHY "GOOD FRIDAY" is called "GOOD." It is "GOOD" because CHRIST, OUR LORD, did CARRY OUR SINS, and SUFFER OUR HELL, and DIE OUR DEATH --- so that we can LAUGH, and SMILE, and HAVE A GOOD TIME.

The question was also asked: "What did you give up for Lent?" Some of us got rather sarcastic: "I gave up coming to school. .... I gave up coming to church ..... I gave up doing my homework"..... and so forth. ..... Any way, there was one Lent in particular when I resolved to give up ALL SWEETS -- DESERTS, CANDY, COOKIES, GUM --- you name it. And talk about PARADING YOUR PIETY!!! ..... Someone would offer me a COOKIE or a PIECE OF CANDY or a STICK OF GUM ----- and my CHEST would go out almost a MILE -- and I would say with STILTED SELF-SATISFACTION: "No thank you -- I have given that up for Lent!" ..... But was I ever HAPPY when LENT was over! I'm sure that is why in MANY PLACES there is a DANCE BEFORE LENT or a MARTI GRAS -- and AFTER LENT there is an EASTER DANCE.

The ONE GOOD THING was the FROSTING on the HOT CROSS BUNS!

Do you begin to see what PHONY RELIGION -- PHONY CHRISTIANITY -- can do to you? I'm sure that MOST OF YOU can recount similar stories of how you were brought up to SHOW

YOUR RELIGION -- YOUR PIETY! But GOD LOOKS AT THE HEART -- THE MOTIVE ----- and HE HATE HYPOCRISY. Each one of us DOES THE RIGHT THING for the WRONG REASON -- "LORD, HAVE MERCY." Each one of us has the desire to be PATTED ON THE BACK -- "Lord, have mercy." Each one of us wants to FLAUNT IT -- "Lord, have mercy."

And do you know? --- THE LORD DOES HAVE MERCY - HE HAS MRRCY UPON US - YOU AND ME! That is what LENT is all about! Come to HIS TABLE -- the TABLE OF HIS BODY AND HIS BLOOD -- -- COME AND CELEBRATE -- LAUGH AND SMILE ----- Yes, even on ASH WEDNESDAY -- even ~~EEMR~~ DURING LENT --- He has CONQUERED DEATH FOR US -- HE FORGIVE OUR SINS --- and we have EVERY REASON TO REJOICE! Amen.