

Ash Wednesday

Ash-Wednesday by Rosanna Eleanor Leprohon

Glitt'ring balls and thoughtless revels
Fill up now each misspent night -
'Tis the reign of pride and folly,
The Carnival is at its height.
Every thought for siren pleasure,
And its sinful, feverish mirth;
Who can find one moment's leisure
For aught else save things of earth?

But, see, sudden stillness falling
O'er those revels, late so loud,
And a hush comes quickly over
All the maddened giddy crowd,
For a voice from out our churches
Has proclaimed in words that burn:
"Only dust art thou, proud mortal,
And to dust shall thou return!"

And, behold, Religion scatters
Dust and ashes on each brow;
Thus replacing gem and flower
With that lowly symbol now:
On the forehead fair of beauty,
And on manhood's front of pride,
Rich and poor and spirit weary -
All receive it, side by side.

And the hearts that throbbed so wildly
For vain pleasure's dreams alone,
For its gilded gauds and follies,
Now at length have calmer grown.
Oh! that voice with heavenly power
Through each restless breast hath thrilled,
And our churches, late so lonely,
Now with contrite hearts are filled.

Fair and lovely are our altars
With their starry tapers bright,
With dim clouds of fragrant incense,
Fair young choristers in white,
And the dying gleam of day-light,
With its blushing crimson glow,
Streaming through the lofty casement
On the kneeling crowd below.

'Tis an hour of golden promise
For the hearts that secret burn
With contrite and anxious wishes
To the Father to return;
For a Saviour, full of mercy,
On His altar-throne is there,
Waiting but that they should ask Him,
For response to whispered prayer.

During the forty days of Lent, God's baptized people cleanse their hearts through the discipline of Lent: repentance, prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Lent is a time in which God's people prepare with joy for the Paschal Feast (Easter). It is a time in which God renews His people's zeal in faith and life. It is a time in which we pray that we may be given the fullness of grace that belongs to the children of God.



In the Dust Storm (1893-1894), Jacek Malczewski (Polish, 1854–1929)

¹⁷ And to Adam he said,
 “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have
 eaten of the tree
 of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’
 cursed is the ground because of you;
 in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;
¹⁸ thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;
 and you shall eat the plants of the field.
¹⁹ By the sweat of your face
 you shall eat bread,
 till you return to the ground,
 for out of it you were taken;
 for you are dust,
 and to dust you shall return.” Genesis 3:17-19



Prayer at the Grave, Artur Grottger (Polish, 1837-1867)

“God is loving to man, and loving in no small measure. Therefore, do not say, ‘I have committed fornication and adultery. I have done dreadful things, and not once only, but often. Could He forgive me? Would He grant me pardon?’ Hear what the psalmist says: ‘How abundant is Your goodness,’ O Lord (Psalm 31:19)! Your accumulated offences cannot surpass the abundance of God’s mercies. Your wounds do not surpass the Great Physician’s skill. Just give yourself up in faith. Tell the Physician your ailment. Say like David, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,’ and the same will happen with you as happened with David, who immediately says, ‘You forgave the iniquity of my sin’ (Psalm 32:5)” -Cyril of Jerusalem, *First Catechetical Lecture*

²³ “Oh that my words were written!
 Oh that they were inscribed in a book!
²⁴ Oh that with an iron pen and lead
 they were engraved in the rock forever!
²⁵ For I know that my Redeemer lives,
 and at the last he will stand upon the earth.
²⁶ And after my skin has been thus destroyed,
 yet in my flesh I shall see God,
²⁷ whom I shall see for myself,
 and my eyes shall behold, and not another.
 My heart faints within me! Job 19:23-27



Repentance of Nineveh (ca. 1840), John Martin (English, 1789-1854)

Almighty and everlasting God, You despise nothing You have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent. Create in us new and contrite hearts, that lamenting ours sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, we may receive from You full pardon and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.