



From ancient times the season of Lent has been kept as a time of special devotion, self-denial, and humble repentance born of a faithful heart that dwells confidently on His Word and draws from it life and hope. (Address, Litany for Ash Wednesday)

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 our 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. (Collect for Ash Wednesday)

As sinners we justly deserve death. Indeed, unless Christ comes on the clouds beforehand, we will all return to the dust from which we came (Genesis 3:19). Yet God does not wish that any should die but that all would repent and receive His gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation won for us in the passion, death, and resurrection of His Son (Ezekiel 18:23, 32, 33:11; 2 Peter 3:9). Consider that the ability to repent is itself a gift from God, created by Him in us, as we cannot do it by our own reason or strength. As we lament our sins, even those against the sanctity of life, and acknowledge our wretchedness not just on Ash Wednesday, but throughout the Church Year, we do so with confidence, knowing that He truly wants us to live and that He will indeed grant us His pardon and forgiveness. When we reach the end of our earthly lives, we can return to the dust confident that God, who created everything out of nothing, and who raised His Son from the dead, will bodily raise each of us on the Last Day to eternal life in Him.

Lententide thus reminds us that our lives really do matter to God, from our conception into eternity. Indeed, all human lives matter to Him and therefore to us. We thank God for His gift of His Son. We pray His blessings on us as we begin the Lenten fast. Furthermore, we pray that, as we share the Gospel with our unchurched neighbors, even our enemies and persecutors, He will use the words with which He has given us, to create new and contrite hearts in them, and make them our baptized brothers and sisters, as we jointly receive His gifts and return our sacrifices of prayer, praise and thanksgiving, as in the great Lenten hymn:

*Christ, the life of all the living, Christ, the death of death our foe,
Who, Thyself for me once giving to the darkest depths of woe:
Through Thy suff'rings, death, and merit I eternal life inherit.
Thousand, thousand thanks shall be, dearest Jesus unto Thee.*
(LSB 420.1)