

# Anglican Orthodox Church



OFFICE OF THE PRESIDING BISHOP

PO Box 128

Statesville, NC 28687

6 March 2019, Anno Domini

## Ash Wednesday

This Ash Wednesday will be a time of deep reflection on the benefits and provisions of God, but also for our abject failure to be a righteous and holy people. Have we done well? Have we been a people of perfect obedience? Have we honored God in all of our ways? We cannot speak with complete credibility of others in the church, but we can assuredly speak for our own selves – we have not been so obedient and holy! Each of us have been, as the Gospel text recommended for the day suggests – Prodigals. We have happily taken of the blessings of God and gone into a far country to waste all. But we have been a righteous people, you aver! Have you really been? Have you taken time to visit the poor and sick on every occasion? Have you given generously of your resources to the work of God? Have you tithed your time and your study moments as well as all else? Has there been time enough to confess all of your sins that you can, at least, remember committing? I use only the opening lines of the Gospel and Epistle for they are suggestive of the whole.

*Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth. 11 And he said, A certain man had two sons: 12 And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth To me. And he divided unto them his living. 13 And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living . . . (Luke 15:10-13)*

Let us read the opening lines of this great parable and discover how we are different from that Prodigal who left his loving Father for the allurements of the world. We have taken the blessings of God in our own hands and have squandered them on desires for which they were not intended – yes, you and I have done so. It is not a nebulous tale intended only for listeners of 2,000 years ago, but for you and me.

Do we doubt that these parables of Jesus apply to us? *God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, 2 Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; 3 Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; (Hebrew 1:1-3)*

As we observe this ASH Wednesday, let us remember that obedience, repentance, love, and faithfulness are not the things to be boasted of. We do not smear ashes on our faces, or disfigure them, to be seen of men as fasting and repentant. The words of Jesus have direct application to the means of fasting and of observing this beginning of the Lenten Season: *Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure*

*their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.* (Matthew 6:16-18) A wicked and adulterous generation seeks an outward sign, but the Lord looks into the heart. *Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.* (1 Corinthians 5:8) We use plain, unleavened bread in our Communion because it represents the sinlessness of the Savior it symbolizes. Simplicity in both worship and service is pleasing to the Lord.

As we observe this Holy Season, let us keep foremost in our minds that it is the Holiness of Christ, and not of ourselves, that we observe. Our hearts are prone to sin and wickedness, but it is the blood of Christ, shed on Mount Calvary that cleanses us and makes us whole if we are penitent.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

For,

ANGLICAN ORTHODOX CHURCH WORLDWIDE

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Jerry L. Ogles".

Jerry L. Ogles, DD, Presiding Bishop