



Bishop Gary Gordon



ASH WEDNESDAY MASS

St. Andrew's Cathedral

February 14, 2018

I kind of forgot how big this place was! I've been away for six months in Port Alberni. Did you miss me?

There's a lot of people here. It's really something to see this many people showing up on a Wednesday night. This is really something. I'm impressed. More than impressed. I guess I shouldn't be amazed because I know you've got so much faith, and it's really beautiful.

And speaking of beauty, I thought, on this Ash Wednesday, I would talk about Valentine's Day. It is Valentine's Day, you know. A gentleman drove up in front of the Pastoral Centre today, and he was looking for what time Mass would be at Sacred Heart, and I didn't know. He said, "Well, you're the Bishop, how come you don't know?" I said, "Because I'm not the pastor!" I rang the doorbell and got Fr. David, and found out Mass was at 6 pm. Then I said, "If you're late for the 6 pm, you can come to the Cathedral at 7 pm!" And then he said, "Yeah, and it's Valentine's Day, and my wife wants me at home!"

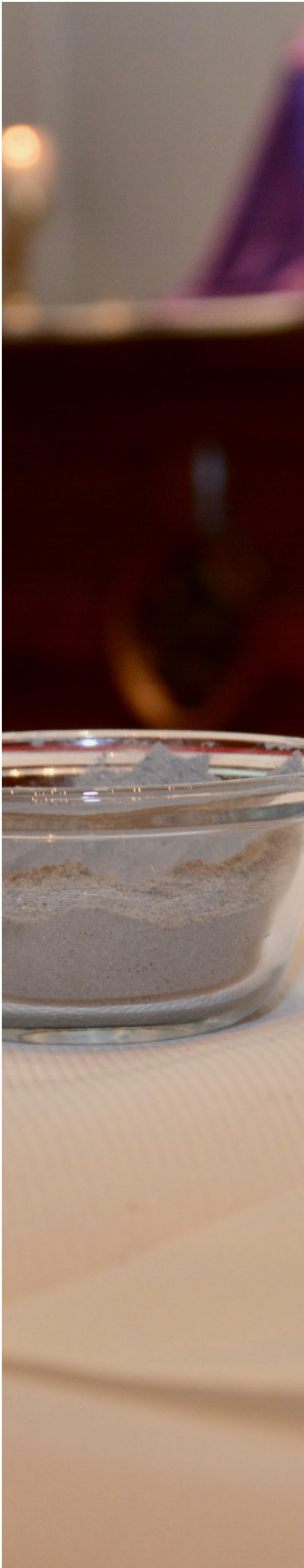
You may all remember, when you were in grade school, we had all these little Valentine's stickers and cards. This was a wonderful thing, and everybody had a lot of fun handing out these Valentine's cards—and why am I speaking about this on Ash Wednesday?

Because Lent is all about the heart. Valentine's Day is all about the heart, at least, I remember seeing the little cards with all these nice little hearts, some with an arrow through it ... it's all about the heart! That's what Lent is about. Lent is all about the heart. God is not interested in

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what you look like! God is not interested in what you wear. God is not interested in whether you're young or old, or big or small. God is interested in your heart.

And guess what? Here is something that we really need to think about during Lent: *my heart and your heart look exactly the same!* How about that? Did you know that? Modern science and medicine have shown us that your heart and my heart are exactly the same. Can you imagine the kind of world we would have if we just let our hearts speak to each other? Think about it. It's beautiful, isn't it? God is interested in our hearts.



I'd like to suggest a way in which we can approach this beautiful season of Lent. As we know from the Valentine's Day cards, and the Valentine's Day messages, it's about being in love. And you often see two hearts on some of the cards, and they are very close to each other. It's really hard to say that you're in love if you're far apart.

I think, and we know, that love demands a closeness, a relationship, a communion, a conversation, a dialogue, so that there is love. So here's my suggestion for Lent: *Let's invite Jesus to be close to us.* And you know what? His heart looks just like yours. He's got the same heart as we do. Let's invite Jesus to be close to us, allow Jesus to be close to us. It says in the first reading that God is the God of compassion, and tenderness, and mercy. So it's a wonderful invitation: Jesus, be close to me.

The second thing—in a few moments, we're going to sprinkle a few ashes on your head. Look at how many people have shown up to get ashes thrown on them. You guys are really something. And I invite you to get close to your frail humanity. Get close to your fragility. Get close to your weakness. Get close to this fact that unto dust we return. Get close to the weakness that is our sinfulness, our pain, our suffering. Get close to this frail dust that is us. It's a great time, Lent, getting close to this fragility, and God, in God's graciousness, holds that fragility, holds that frailness. God holds that heart that is your heart, and my heart.

And the third invitation for this beautiful, wonderful season of Lent — *Lent* is a word that means *springtime*, *newness*. Something new is happening. Jesus is coming close to our hearts; we are coming close to our own frailty; and

thirdly, we need to get close to the poor. Of all the things that we are invited to as Christians, it is to become close to those who are poor, to those who are vulnerable, to those who are weak. To be able to say, "I have a friend who lives on the street." Get close to the poor and vulnerable. To be able to say, "I have a friend who is in William Head jail." Get close to the poor and the vulnerable.

So in this beautiful time of Lent, I invite you to *closeness*, the closeness of Jesus Christ, the closeness of our own fragility and weakness—and the challenge for all of us is to become close to the poor, the vulnerable, and the weak.

I want you to know that I am praying for you, all through Lent. Actually, I pray for you all year, but in a special way, I want you to know that you're really in my heart during Lent. It's so that your hearts may know the closeness of Jesus.

A nice thought is to let Jesus get close enough to take your pulse. It's a beautiful thought. Jesus, taking your pulse. And if we could just get close enough to one another to take their pulse, especially close enough to the poor, the vulnerable, the people who we may not want to be close to. If we could just reach out, take their pulse—what you find is that everyone has the same pulse; it's beautiful. So may this holy season of Lent, which just happens to start on Valentine's Day, be a wonderful season for our hearts.

Have a good Lent. It's a wonderful springtime. It's a time of precious, boundless mercy, given to us in Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Watch Bishop Gary's homily
online: [www.youtube.com/
watch?v=6OLen8ozg9Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6OLen8ozg9Y)