

Finding Passion in Your Heart
Ash Wednesday

“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Matthew 6:
21

What is your passion? Ladies is it men? Men is it ladies? What drives your motor? What gets you up in the morning? Or gives you a zest for life? Some simply it's Maxwell House! Seriously, people have all manner of pursuits that percolate passion in their lives. What's yours?

If we are in search for knowledge – passion will be there. In each of the gifts and fruit of the Holy Spirit passion is involved in each. When you pray to God, do it with passion in your heart, as to one who dearly loves. In Psalm 103 we read, “As a father cares for his children, so does the Lord care for those who fear him.”

These next forty days of Lent are a season in which we will trace the steps of Jesus ministry leading up to his Passion, Death and New Life. Jesus will undergo a time of testing of which few on earth can tell. Jesus will be rejected by those he came to love and serve. And you and I are invited to come along and enter into his passion with our pink slippers. Yes, we are a bit removed from what happened two thousand years ago. Yet, God uses these forty days to get our hearts, the very center of our beings, ready for His Passion. Few can comprehend or contain that Passion for life as Jesus taught and lived it. Few can grasp the pain and suffering it took to take on a forty day death sentence to provide the gift of salvation. That gift was costly and the cost was His Passion.

As we say in the business world that savings is truly passed on to the customer. There is however a demand that comes with the warranty on that gift and rightly so. Customers of Christ's gift of Passion carry a demand upon them for a life of passionate service which is reasonable. A life of passionate service to others can free this gift of life in people whose passion is dead. These are people whose hearts will not be satisfied with butter burgers at Culvers – No! they want, they long for filet mignon at the Outback! That's passion – wanting to live at maximum warp! Such passion must be given away to make room for more filet. That's how it works!

The signs of this first day of Lent are quite obvious. They are outward signs, being marked with the ashes of last year's palms. It's outward so we humans can see it. Only God can see the heart. The

palms we use each year are signs of human passion that fizzle out when the day is done. The Hosannas of Palm Sunday turn to Crucify Him! on Friday. So these ashes remind us that sin is rejection of our true passion and his name is Jesus Christ! That sin and rejection led him to his death. These ashes tell the human story of how the passion of God's people died with Jesus Christ.

Dust cloth and ashes were signs in ancient days of mourning loss. They were signs of having lost one's desire to live. May the ashes on the outer body make their way into your soul where we hope, pray and trust that a passion of life can be reborn.

Once reborn what will this passionate life and service do? It gets on with the business of walking with Christ and learning from him these forty days. In Matthew's gospel he tells us:

"Practice your piety before God and not people." Give alms in secret. Pray to God in secret (that usually involves closing a door and going outdoors away from anyone else). And fast in secret. Notice that fasting is both taking away food or activities and putting on water and oil. Some therefore teach that fasting can be taking on a charity, a service or a gift of time to others.

Lastly, we are urged to practice such devotion more completely by laying up heavenly treasures. When I was a kid my Dad had a knife that he bought in Alaska along with a claw from a Kodiak bear one of the largest. As a kid, I remember sneaking into his dresser to get a peek at that knife and pull it out of its sheath. I wanted that knife badly. When he died a few years ago that knife became mine. Yet that treasure had lost its meaning. I was no longer a child. I grew up. When I retired from the Navy I gave that knife to my son who appreciates far more than I can.

The heavenly treasures do not need dressers or safety deposit boxes. Heavenly treasures are compounded for eternity when used daily before God. These treasures come from our passion in life, a passion for truth, a passion for service to others. They are ways we can give our lives away so that the ashes of despair can not harm us. What value can one put on a heart filled with such passion for life? Taking our pink slippers, our sandals or whatever we take on the journey this season of Lent, God will be looking for ways to bless you and bring you heavenly treasures. The Journey with Christ - precious. The Passion of Christ -priceless! AMEN.