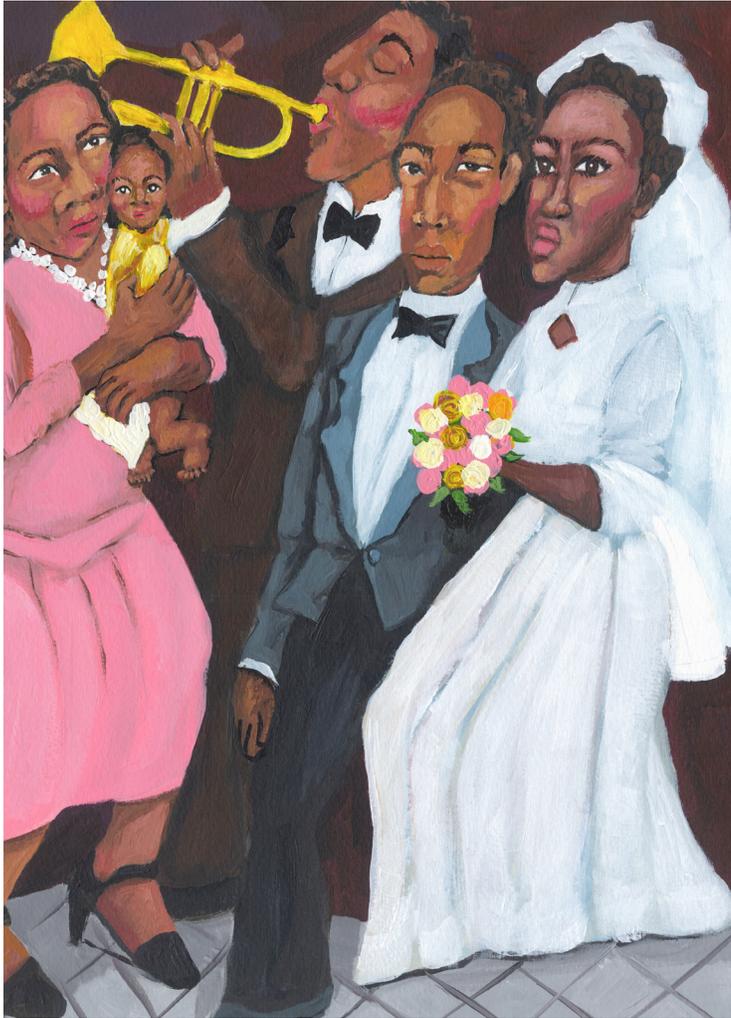


ASH WEDNESDAY



Unbounded Mercy

Gracious and merciful Father,
we are assembled before you,
returning to you with humble hearts
as we enter this sacred season of Lent.
Accept our repentant spirits,
and spare us with your unbounded mercy;
Bless our offerings, those of joy and those
of sorrow;
for we know your blessings in our lives
and approach you with open hearts.
May the spirit of the People of God
proclaim a community of joyful praise,
assembled wisdom, and prayerful
proclamation
as we gather in your name,
and commend ourselves to you.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Ash Wednesday, March 1, 2017

Do Not Look Gloomy



Today's Readings: Joel 2:12–18; Psalm 51:3–4, 5–6ab, 12–13, 14, 17; 2 Corinthians 5:20—6:2; Matthew 6:1–6, 16–18. Lent is a penitential season, but Jesus reminds us that none of our penitential practices call us to be gloomy. Rather, in our penitence, we are called to turn our lives around. If we practice giving alms, but seem to do so only to bring attention to ourselves, then our giving has little meaning. If we practice changing our lives, and do so with joy, then that practice will lead to more joy.

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells his disciples not to be like hypocrites, as he challenges their motivation. If we are true disciples of Jesus, then our baptismal call is our motivation. How are we Christ to others? In this solemn season of Lent, our motivation is not only to turn our lives around. We are

motivated also to return our lives to their baptismal character and approach the font renewed at Easter. Paul reminds us in the Second Reading not to receive the grace of God in vain. If we are disciples and ambassadors of Christ, then our Baptism has strengthened us to work on repairing our sinful ways. And what better time than now. Behold, now is a very acceptable time. Behold, now is the day of salvation.

As Lent begins, let us work on renewing our Baptism. This Ash Wednesday, let us proclaim with inner joy our lives grounded in Christ, united by the Spirit, and welcomed home by the Father. If we practice with eagerness, prayerfulness, and inner consistency, then our baptismal call and our baptismal nature will emerge, and Christ will be our face to the world.