

ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑ ΑΠΟΣΤΟΛΙΚΟΣ ΠΛΗΡΩΜΑΤΟΣ
Apostolic Church of the Pleroma

*Delivered by Tau Phosphoros
to the Parish of St. Ambelain
on Wednesday, March 1, 2017*

ASH WEDNESDAY

Welcome, everybody, to our special celebration of Ash Wednesday, beginning officially our Lenten Season. Our readings today are so beautiful, and so richly loaded with important teachings, that we cannot hope to even scratch the surface of them today. They should, however, serve as points of meditation over the next few days, and in fact throughout the entire Lenten Season.

Let us look briefly, though, at our Gospel reading from Matthew. We read here to pray in secret, to give alms in secret, and to store up spiritual treasures, which are eternal, instead of worldly treasures, which decay and pass away. The idea of praying and doing good works in secret should be fairly obvious. It does not mean that we should not congregate as faithful to sorship and pray together; it does not mean that no good deed should ever be performed in public. It means that we are to show humility, and that we should not be hypocritical.

We have all seen those who make a display of themselves when praying, making sure that everyone knows what they are doing, carrying the subtle suggestion that you aren't quite as holy or worthy as him. Or, the one who makes a large charitable donation and organizes a dinner in his honor to acknowledge his tireless efforts... efforts that he makes sure are known to as many as possible, that he might be lauded for his great and magnanimous spirit.

I may be using somewhat extreme or exaggerated examples, but these types of actions occur on varying scales all the time. If praise from you fellow creatures is what you desire, then that alone shall be your reward. If you desire the treasures of the spirit, it is only in silent communion with the Divine that you may hope to attain them.

Matthew says, "Do not store up earthly treasures for yourself...but store up treasures for yourself in heaven...for where your treasure is, there too will be your heart." This last line is very telling. Once, when taking a Philosophy of Religion course, the professor expounded on this in a way. He made the assertion that you could determine a persons religion by watching what they did, specifically what they put the most time and care into. He used as an example a man who owns expensive sports car, and who spends all day on his day off work to clean and polish every square inch of his beloved machine, inside and out, with a meticulous and painstaking care. Now, this man may claim to be a Christian, or a Jew, or whatever, but in fact he places all of his love and adoration into his true object of desire: his car. It is his automobile, therefore, that is his true religion. This is a very apt analogy, and has remained with me for many years. And it is a most appropriate exposition of Matthew's statement that: "For where you treasure is, there too will be your heart."

Perhaps we cannot yet renounce every material good, but we can put some perspective into what we value, and where we place our adoration and care; let our objects of desire be worthy of such adoration.