

# Heart ♥ to ♥ Heart



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When the Heart to Heart team met to plan our February issue, we were struck by the recognition that Valentine's Day and Ash Wednesday coincide this year. As we considered whom we might invite to share reflections on this theme, we acknowledged how consistently we rely on our readers to provide content for the issues of Heart to Heart and how grateful we are for the generous responses we receive.

In the spirit of St. Angela who says to us, "Whatever you want others to do, do it first yourselves," we asked ourselves if perhaps this time we would be the ones to offer reflections. So that is what we have done for this February issue. Each of us spent time reflecting on this year's convergence of Valentine's Day and Ash Wednesday. Here are our reflections.

As we embark on the Lenten Season this year, we find ourselves at a unique time in history as Ash Wednesday and Valentine's Day coincide. While some may be concerned about reconciling liturgical requirements of fasting and abstinence with preparing a mouthwatering meal for loved ones, others pause to ask, "What can we learn from the juxtaposition of these two events with their focus on fasting, sacrifice and love?" In Lent, sacrifice and love come together. During Lent we remember Christ making the ultimate sacrifice of His life for us because of love. Every Lent invites us to a deeper experience and understanding of the Paschal Mystery in our personal and communal lives.

How will we find God this year as we reflect on this juxtaposition? What do the signs of the times in our world today say to us? The lyrics of Dionne Warwick singing "What the world needs now is Love, sweet Love... not just for some, but for everyone," keeps running through my head.

We cannot deny that we are surrounded by challenges of all kinds: climate change, war, violence, polarization, the unhoused, food insecurity and poverty. As followers of Angela, what do we bring to these challenges? How do we emerge from the ashes, this Lenten Season, with hope? How will we grapple with death and resurrection,

sacrifice and love? What will be some of our choices that intentionally bring life to the challenges particular to us? How will we enter into the Paschal Mystery of Christ?

St. Angela calls us to be "attentive to the signs of the times." She reminds us that "in these dangerous and pestilential times, you will find no other refuge than at the feet of Jesus Christ." It is there that we will know and learn Love, Mercy and Conversion. With Christ we will enter into His suffering, death and resurrection. "Living community wherever we go," we do not walk this road alone. We are encouraged by the legacy Angela leaves us in her writings:

"Learn from our Lord who...was as a servant, obeying...even unto death." (5<sup>th</sup> Counsel)

And again,

"Wherever they are, they should seek to spread peace and concord." (5<sup>th</sup> Counsel)

We take up the Lenten challenge this year to bring love to our troubled world wherever we can. We forge new roads, knowing, that we "will achieve more with kindness and gentleness than with harshness and sharp rebukes." Let us then "Act, Move, Believe," and we will experience many surprises.

—Jeanette Lombardi, OSU  
Novato, CA

*“Rend your hearts, not your garments, and return to the Lord, your God.” (Joel 2:13)*

Lent begins with this familiar reading from Joel. This year, the prophet’s words have a particularly unique meaning, as Ash Wednesday coincides with St. Valentine’s Day, the symbolic day of loving hearts. Jewish tradition, known as *Keriah*, requires mourners to expose their hearts, tearing clothing at the death of a loved one. This practice may be traced throughout the Hebrew Scripture. When Jacob saw his beloved son, Joseph’s, coat of many colors drenched in blood, he rent his garments. David tore his clothes when he learned of the death of Saul, and Job, who was well-acquainted with grief, ripped his robe. For each, the destruction of clothing indicated broken-heartedness at the death of a loved one. We suffer deeply when we can no longer give love to those we love most in the world.

However, when our hearts are broken, they are also open to the mercy, love and kindness of God. This vulnerability creates an opportunity to return to God

with our whole, if broken, hearts. God’s mercy and love can be transformational for our hearts if we are open to the Lenten practices of prayer, fasting and almsgiving. This other-centered approach helps us to draw closer to God, particularly if we follow the advice of Saint Teresa of Calcutta who often observed, “It’s not how much we give but how much love we put into giving.”

This is the eternal intimacy that we seek: a relationship with God whose heart knows no limits of loving. As we live out this relationship, we cannot help but desire to become more like God, and to offer ourselves, in service to others. We want to love others as God loves us. It can be transformative to let our hearts be open to those who are deeply in need in our communities.

May this Lent break open our hearts in ways that allow us to love, boundlessly, bringing us from death to eternal life!

—Mary-Kate Tracy  
Dedham, MA



It is unusual for Ash Wednesday and Valentine’s Day to occur on the same day as is happening this year. Recently during a homily at Mass, the priest spoke of Jesus having been able to deal with “both/and” in his ministry. It brought to my mind this year’s double celebration on February 14. Both days have a long history, and both are days of the heart.

Little is known about St. Valentine, and many who celebrate Valentine’s Day may know nothing about him. However, during the reign of the Roman Emperor Claudius in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, there was a man named Valentine who was imprisoned for ministering to persecuted Christians. According to tradition, he restored sight to his jailer’s blind daughter. Another legend claims that Valentine wrote the jailer’s daughter a letter before his execution and signed it “Your Valentine.” Across the centuries the name Valentine has appeared in poetry and visual art. In the United States Valentine’s Day has become a secular celebration of love using images of red hearts and the giving of cards, flowers, and chocolates in heart-shaped boxes to loved ones.

In the Old Testament, ashes symbolized mourning, mortality, and penance. Jesus refers to sackcloth and ashes as a form of penance in Matthew’s gospel (11:21).

In 325AD, the Council of Nicaea established 40 days of fasting as the length of Lent. In the 7<sup>th</sup> century, Pope Gregory began the tradition of marking parishioners’ foreheads with ashes in the shape of a cross.

Love and the heart are central to our observance of Lent and the Paschal Mystery. In his Ash Wednesday homily in 2018, Pope Francis said, “Lent is the time...to allow our hearts to beat once more in tune with the vibrant heart of Jesus.” The heart is very present in Ash Wednesday’s liturgical texts. The first reading from the prophet Joel reminds us, “Rend your hearts, and not your garments, and return to the Lord, your God.” In the responsorial psalm, we pray, “A clean heart create for me, O God,” and the gospel is introduced by the verse, “If today you hear God’s voice, harden not your hearts.” By our prayer, fasting, and almsgiving we turn our hearts to God in us, in our neighbor, and in our world so torn by divisions, violence, and war.

We hear Angela calling us to:

“Act, move, believe, strive, hope,  
cry out to God with all your heart.”

(Prologue to the *Counsels*)

—Mary Alice Duggan, OSU  
New Rochelle, NY

A few days ago, this image came across my computer screen in a pre-Lenten reflection:



The image has stayed with me as I have pondered what it might mean for us this year as we celebrate both Valentine's Day and Ash Wednesday on February 14. **LENT** in the middle of **VALENTINE** and of the **HEART** so often used to image and express the various kinds of love that Valentine's Day invites us to celebrate.

From there I was led to the words from the prophet Joel that call us every year into the season of Lent: "Yet even now, says your God, return to me with all your heart..." (Joel 2:12) and to Jesus' Gospel words: "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Luke 12:34). Might the convergence this year of Valentine's Day and Ash Wednesday call us to *heart-searching* rather than *soul-searching*: When I search into my heart, what do I find there? What are the treasures that fill my heart and reveal to me where my heart really is? What in my heart both helps and hinders my returning to God with the whole-heartedness for which God asks?

We are blessed with glimpses of St. Angela's *heart-searching* in the prayer she shares with us in Chapter V of her *Rule*. "My God, light up the darkness of my heart," she prays there. Perhaps her prayer is a place for our own prayer in the Lenten days ahead. We recognize that Angela's prayer itself carries the words, images, and spirituality of her time which may or may not speak to our own. I have been drawn to a Paraphrase of Angela's Prayer written by Sr. Dorothea Gooud, an Australian Ursuline. It is one of the songs on a 2006 CD, "Singing Our Story," a project of the Australian Province of the Ursulines of the Roman Union. I am sharing Sr. Dorothea's paraphrase and offering it for our own Lenten prayer and reflection:

*Enlighten, O Lord, the darkness of my heart,  
the gateways to my spirit open wide;  
My eyes, my ears, my pow'r to feel and love,  
O Divine Majesty, pour in your radiant light  
So strong, so clear that I would rather die  
than lose that radiance shining from your Face.*

*Let me not betray the trust you place in me  
Within that secret room which is my heart  
I lay before you, Lord, my weakness and my sin  
Blind, lame, bent down, I can't look to you.  
But night and day, at work and rest, I pray  
My Healer, lay your gentle hand on me.*

*Your mercy is my hope; forgive me, Lord, restore  
The crystal clearness of Baptismal grace  
And thus I pray, O Lord, for those you give to me  
With all in this vast world, Jesus, you died to save.  
And by your passion, by your blood outpoured –  
In pity grant us time for change of heart.*

*I give to you, my Lord, my only life and hope,  
Your dear-bought treasures I have called my own.  
Within, without, they are your gifts to me.  
Oh cast your fire of love upon my dried-up heart.  
Consume its dead wood like the wild bush fire,  
Then touch to green new growth of love and peace.*

*How long I've made you wait for my poor service, Lord.  
Life's hurts are hard to bear when love is small.  
Yet I can truly say my greatest sorrow, Lord,  
Is watching human beings turn from love.  
I'd gladly give my life to cure their blindness.  
Take all I am and have! Blessed be your name!*

—Diane Fulgenzi, OSU  
St. Louis, MO

*"My God, light  
up the  
darkness of  
my heart..."*