



This month we begin the season of Lent, which of course, begins with Ash Wednesday. This year Ash Wednesday coincides with Valentine's Day. These two days seem to have little in common; one day is dedicated to flowers, chocolate and romantic love, and the other a day of fasting, abstinence and ashes. The common denominator, however, is love.

St. Valentine was probably a Roman priest who chose to defy the law and marry young couples. He was arrested and martyred on February 14<sup>th</sup>. St. Valentine embodies what it means to live as a selfless kind of love. He defied the law at his own peril for the sake of love. Ash Wednesday begins the season of Lent, a time of preparation for the celebration of God's ultimate act of love for each of us. Christ gave up his life on the cross so that we can be forgiven and live.

Many times during Lent, we make sacrifices of a personal nature. Perhaps we give up things like chocolate, chips, coffee or habits like Facebook or TV. We give up these things in order to draw closer to God. While these personal sacrifices are well and good, we can sometimes forget that our faith is not something that just concerns us. We are members of the body of Christ and we always need to work for the good of others, to show God's love to others. Can this Lent be about more than my own personal devotions and sacrifices? Can I do something different this Lent to benefit others?

God calls us to a particular kind of love, an agape love. Agape is a choice that we can make to care for others even if we don't know them and even if we receive little or nothing in return. It is a call to a consistent choice, to love simply because it is a good thing. This Lent we can work to aid others, especially those that our culture tells us we should exclude. It may be easier to give up chocolate for a few weeks than it is to sacrifice for the good of others, but God calls us to more than just a personal faith. We are called to build up the body of Christ. For the sake of love, and following St. Valentine's example, let us look for opportunities to serve others to build them up while looking for nothing in return.



*By Marie O'Connell, Chaplaincy Leader, Holy Trinity CSS*