

GOSPEL MESSAGE

February 18, 2026

ASH WEDNESDAY

It Should Be No Secret

Just about anyone who reaches their ninetieth birthday has been asked at least once, “What is the secret to a long life?” The answers will vary: A good diet. Staying active. Not stressing over the little things. Even making your bed every morning or keeping a tidy house has been linked with a longer lifespan! Fostering good habits and living with intention can go a long way.

But what is the secret to a rich spiritual life? In a sense, this is precisely the question Jesus addresses at length in his Sermon on the Mount. “Blessed are the poor in spirit” is just the beginning of a sermon that goes on to address such topics as prayer, wealth, worry, judgment, and daily needs. His advice about practices like charity, prayer, and fasting speaks to the importance of the intentions and motivations we bring to our common life.

There’s nothing wrong with praying with others or public acts of charity. Churches, synagogues, and religious communities in general engage in these activities. The issue is whether we shine light on ourselves or on God’s mercy and on people and places in need.

Ash Wednesday begins the season of Lent with a reminder to turn to God. Where are our lives going? Where is the church going? The light of the world is not meant to be kept hidden or secret. Where and upon whom will we choose to direct the light of God’s mercy and love? The reward of this examination and turning to God is the treasure we choose to share freely with others rather than keep for ourselves.

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