

**Ash Wednesday  
February 17, 2010  
12:15 Liturgy**

**J.A. Loftus, S.J.**

**Each and every year, Lent begins with a quiet invitation to repentance. Every Ash Wednesday begins with the prayer I used a few minutes ago: “Let us pray in quiet remembrance of our need for redemption.”**

**The word repent has little to do, really, with sackcloth and ashes. It has little to do with how many desserts I will pass-up in the next forty days. It has little to do even with how much money I can save to distribute to the poor, or how much I will try to pray harder or longer in Lent. Those are all wonderful and very practical goals, but they are only the means; they are not the end of this journey.**

**The end is much more interior and profoundly personal for each one of us. The word repent literally means “to turn around.” To turn yourself around. To turn your heart around. That is the real goal of Lent each and every year. It’s about me—and it’s about you—in the depths of our hearts. Where *Abba*, the father: the one who sees in secret; who is hidden, and who sees what is hidden; and who knows and repays us. That is the point of Matthew’s gospel.**

**Prayer, fasting and almsgiving are three traditional descriptions of what**

any one of us can “do” for Lent. But Lent is, in the final analysis, not about “doing” at all. Things I might “do” for Lent are the means only, not the end. The end is to find myself, my whole self, turned around a bit, and tuned-up in my heart.

We can all learn a lesson this Lent from the Toyota Motor Company. They have just announced one of the largest re-calls in automotive history. (If you own a Toyota I’m sure you are more than aware.) Some models are having problems with the accelerator. Some models with the brakes. Some models with the steering. But they all need to be re-called for an “overhaul” and re-tuning.

Look around this church. We, too, have many different models sitting here today. Some may be having accelerator issues. Some may be having brake issues. Some may be having steering issues.

Sometimes the accelerator sticks to the floor and the whole world becomes a blur. But sometimes the accelerator won’t work at all, and life gets too slow to even imagine.

But some other models might be having brake issues. They can’t stop or slow down. While other models find themselves steering in some new and pretty strange directions. They find themselves inexplicably wandering all

over the road with no goal or direction in sight.

Let's take a page from Toyota this Lent, and let ourselves be re-called for a tune-up—knowing that sometimes, “somethings” just get broke.

Let yourself be *turned around* to look. (The Greek word is have a *metanoia*. A change of *heart!*) That's what repentance means. As we will pray in a minute with ashes, let yourself be turned away from all that is a dead-end, and turned again toward the gospel.

And remember this parish's Christmas greeting to you all. In the words of the poet Mary Oliver: “...this isn't a contest, but the doorway into thanks, and a silence in which another voice may speak.”