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On My Heart Imprint

Your Image



Lenten Devotions

February 14—17

On my heart imprint Your image,
Blessed Jesus, King of grace,
That life's riches, cares and pleasures
Never may Your work erase;
Let the clear inscription be:
Jesus crucified for me,
Is my life, my hope's foundation,
And my glory and salvation!

Lutheran Service Book 422

Ashes by Rev. Raymond Salemink

Crown of Thorns by Rev. David Tannahill

The Cursed Fig Tree by Rev. Jonathan Mueller

The Cross by Rev. A. Daniel Guagenti

Illustrations by Joni Skellie

The Cross

Read Philippians 2:8



Stiff. The boards of the cross do not flex or cushion. This is their purpose, to hold the human body in a pose which both tortures and kills.

To breathe normally, the muscles of the chest pull air in and then relax to exhale. The posture of crucifixion reverses this most basic activity of life. Pushing up on nailed hands and feet, the crucified must strain to exhale.

Had the legs or arms not been nailed as they were to the cross, death would come more quickly. The particular nailed posture was calculated to lengthen the painful process of death, making each breath a misery.

Stiff. That's all until the cross turns its victim into a corpse. When the breath finally leaves the body, the change is horrifying. There are so many supple details in the living body. Each body reflects personality in posture, eye contact, even the cadence of breath.

When we think of the image of the cross, sing of the "wondrous cross," pray to the Crucified, we do well to keep this image clear—stiff, lifeless, unyielding.

The Prince of Life was crucified in order to die. He died in order to bring life.

That stiff, broken body of the Nazarene rose three days later, life filling His lungs forevermore. When we pray to the Crucified, the Lamb who was slain, the Victor over the death, we pray to the One whose lungs had stopped and stiffened but filled again and forevermore.

Exhale. Now the crucified breathes out the breath of life. *Exhale.* Now we rest in Him. This is a peace very different than some imagine for the dead. This is the peace of life in the Crucified.

By Rev. A. Daniel Guagenti

We Pray

"See, from His head, His hands, His feet / Sorrow and love flow mingled down! / Did e'er such love and sorrow meet / Or thorns compose so rich a crown? / Were the whole realm of nature mine, / That were a tribute far too small; / Love so amazing, so divine, / Demands my soul, my life, my all!" Amen. (LSB 425)

Ashes

Read Job 42:6



Ashes are as nothing. Ashes barely exist. They float nearly weightless in the air, defying gravity, yet are powerless to resist even the slightest air current.

Ashes are an appropriate symbol to signify mourning, humility and repentance, when the sinner is brought to nothing, robbed of hope in self, stripped of all pride and arrogance, despairing of any rescue after the all-consuming fire of God's Law has burned away human sinfulness. All that is left is a bare, naked soul of ashes at the mercy of the wind. In our sins, we are but nothing, barely existing, in danger of being crushed into oblivion underneath the Lord's feet.

The Lord promises to lift up those repenting with despair over their sin. Upon the same forehead once marked with the sign of the cross in baptism, we mark our foreheads with a cross of ashes, a sign of our woe and anguish over sin. We plead for the Lord's mercy and grace in Christ, for unless He saves us, we are but dust and ashes, destined to be obliterated by the fire of God's anger for sin.

Christ Jesus came to endure the fiery judgment on the cross where the Righteous Judge expends His wrath. Sin is burned up there, and Jesus blows away the ashes of our sins in the gentle breeze of His expiring breath. With His precious blood, He cleans us and restores the mark of His claim on us as His children. In His grace, He exchanges the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit, a beautiful head-dress for our ashes (Is. 61:3).

By Rev. Raymond Salemink

We Pray

Lord, I repent of my sins and cast them all upon Jesus. Burn them up in the heat of His suffering, that I may be cleansed, renewed and raised up in His righteousness. Amen.

February 15

CROWN OF THORNS

Read Mark 15:17-18



It shimmers with 2,868 diamonds, 17 sapphires, 11 emeralds and 269 pearls. Set on top of it is a gemstone known as the Black Prince's Ruby, which weighs 170 carats. It is the Imperial State Crown. It's believed to have been worn by Henry V at the Battle of Agincourt in 1415, and it was worn by Elizabeth II at her coronation. It's so heavy that in a recent BBC special, the Queen smiled and told reporters, "You can't look down to read the speech; you have to take the speech up ... because if you did, your neck would break." That's because the crown weighs almost 2.5 pounds.

As they prepared Jesus for crucifixion, Mark tells us, "Twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on Him." The crown that Jesus wore would not have weighed very much. However, along with the thorns, it was studded with your sins and mine and the shame and guilt of the world. In Paul Gerhardt's great Lenten hymn we sing, "O sacred Head, now wounded, With grief and shame weighed down, Now scornfully surrounded With thorns, Thine only crown" (LSB 450).

In love for you and me Jesus accepted that crown as it was placed upon His head. The few words of His speech that day have brought us eternal comfort. He wore the heavy burden of our sins, all of them, to the cross and died in our place for our forgiveness. When everything needed for your salvation and mine was accomplished, Jesus said "It is finished," and He bowed His head and gave up His spirit" (Jn 19:30).

By Rev. David Tannahill

WE PRAY

Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the King of Israel! Hosanna to my Savior. Amen.

February 16

CURSED FIG TREE

Read Mark 11:13, 14, 20



It seems unfair that Jesus cursed the fig tree. After all, it was not the season for figs. The fig tree was just following its schedule. Why would Jesus expect it to bear fruit?

Like the fig tree, our lives also have seasons. We go to school and to work, we have our meals, we sleep and awaken, on a regular schedule. Every year, every day, every hour, we are on a schedule. Just like the fig tree.

Jesus had no respect for the fig tree's schedule. We might wonder if Jesus will treat us the same way, ignoring our schedules and plans for the future.

But thinking of the cursed fig tree, we should consider that life is not the only thing that runs on a schedule. Death has a schedule too. Like clockwork, it is surely coming.

Thankfully, Jesus has come to break that appointment. Because of Jesus' work on the cross, the season of death will not come for you. Jesus has arrived. The season of death is over. The season of life has begun.

By Rev. Jonathan Mueller

WE PRAY

Almighty Father, You are the Lord of times and seasons, and you have set our lives to run according to Your schedule. We give thanks for Your Son Jesus, Who, in place of death, has given us a season of life without end; in His name, Amen.