



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

Ash Wednesday

Dust to dust and ashes to ashes

Readings: *Joel 2: 12-8, Ps 50, 2 Corinthians 5: 20-6:2, Matthew 6: 1-6, 16-18*

In a few moments time I shall invite a server or one of the congregation to put his thumb in the blessed ash and mark the Cross of Christ on my forehead. He will, of his charity and truthfulness, remind me that I am but a man, that amalgam of blood and dust, that I have come from dust and unto dust I shall return. It will follow that I will then do the same for him and for you.

Each of us comes into the Lenten season, the penitential weeks, the long days of spiritual audit and self examination, knowing beyond all else that we are mortal, doomed to die, our integrity of body and soul to be disintegrated in the putrefaction of matter, our identity reduced to the failing memory of those who will shortly follow us, the places we have lived and delighted in as if we had never been.

The remembrance of our mortality would, without the Catholic Faith, leave us as creatures without hope or expectation. But we do not 'ash' one another as an inspiration to self pity or introversion and gloom. We use this simple sacramental to tell the truth.

We are dust.

But we are not dust without hope or futurity because we are the animated dust of God's creation. It is into this little dust that God has breathed life. It is into this little house of clay that the Holy Spirit of God has deigned to dwell through the mystery of the Sacraments.

This ash proclaims the limitations of matter. But we are not materialists. If matter is all there is then we don't matter at all.

This ash proclaims more. For throughout the history of the Faith men and women have turned to God and robed themselves in dust and ashes to emphasise their sorrow for sin, their true and heartfelt dependence on the Divine Mercy and their putting away of all the objects and objectives and obsessions that come between the soul of man and the life of God.

In telling the truth about our human dilemma with this blessed ash we also proclaim our hope. For this ash is not just an immolation of matter, it is a holocaust, a ritual burning of the Palm Cross which signifies Our Lord's journey into the supreme sacrifice of the Calvary, the turning point in the history of fallen Man.

We are marked for death. That is the inheritance of sinful and mortal man. But, as we come in sorrow for those sins and hope of reconciliation, in faithfulness and longing for the love and mercy of God, so we are marked for life in the holocaust of the Cross of Christ.

Our Lenten journey is there to remind us of the great truths of our life and death. It is given for a full self examination in the light of God's great gift to us in Christ. It is given that we might fast from our excess. It is given that we

might deepen our prayer life. It is given that we might be brought to our knees before the crucified in adoration. It is given that we might humbly and penitently come to the ministry of reconciliation in the Sacrament of Confession from whence the journey of all serious Lenten pilgrims should begin.

If we wish to celebrate the Feast we need to keep the fast. We need to be free of, what Scripture calls, the leaven of malice and wickedness. By the mercy of Christ we can do that. Jesus has given to His Church the power to absolve sin, to liberate the heart and mind and soul. Only a fool would refuse such glorious generosity.

If it's a long time since you've been to Confession or forgotten how or just want to talk it through first then come and talk. But don't turn away from what Christ is offering you through His Church in this holy season. Let's get serious about our souls.

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