



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

Ash Wednesday

Sign of repentance

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

Many years ago I had just come out of our Ash Wednesday Mass and was walking down the High Road when greeted by the local garage owner. Chris was a delightful man, good hearted and a generous supporter of the local community and a lapsed Catholic. We chatted for a bit and I could see Chris' attention being increasingly drawn to my forehead where, as it transpired, the server had impressed a particularly large and black ash cross.

Eventually Chris came out with it. 'I hope you will excuse me mentioning it, father, but you've got a dirty mark on your forehead'. I waited a moment for the penny to drop and then replied, 'and so should you have too.' Chris tumbled to it and, amidst laughter and embarrassment, we got a chance to talk about the Faith.

We are a people of signs and symbols, imagery and imagination. Each part of our outward show signifies something deeper, something permanent, something real. The light before the Tabernacle reminds us of the Light of the World who truly dwells therein. The statue of Our Lady bearing the Christ child points us to the motherhood of the Church, her love of Jesus and her constant presentation of Him to the world. The gifts of bread and

wine transport our little time-locked selves to the Upper Room and the Calvary and, Spirit blessed, re-present Christ, the Real Presence revealed on the Catholic altars of Christendom.

Today we receive on our heads the mark of the Ash. The task of Lent is to make that simple sign a reality in our lives. From ancient times the Ash was a mark of penitence. For us, therefore, Lent is a time for repentance, for recognition of how far short we fall of the glory of God. It is a time for deep spiritual cleansing, climaxing in the beautiful gift of reconciliation and the triumph of the Paschal mystery. It is a springtime of the soul.

And we do that in the context of those solemn words applied with the ash. 'Remember, O Man, that you are dust and unto dust you shall return'. Everything is in the context of our mortality. Everything is in the light of our dying. As I get older I am still irritated by the regular tedious repetitive failures of my sinfulness that I drag to the foot of the Cross in the company of my confessor. But what troubles me more are the sins of omission, the things I have failed to do for God. To repentance therefore we must add recommitment to the proclamation of the Gospel and make our daily prayer, 'Lord, in the time we have left, give us the energy and the courage to proclaim your kingdom in all we do and say and are that, in the glorious mystery of Christ's Rising, this little dust of our humanity may yet have life and live to praise you in all eternity.'