

ASH WEDNESDAY, 17 FEBRUARY 2021.

JOEL 2:12-18; PSALM 51; 2 COR 5:20-6:2; MATTHEW 6:1-6, 16-18.

Today we begin the holy season of Lent with the ash Wednesday liturgy.

This year, the manner of imposition of ashes will be slightly different but the substance of the liturgy remains the same. Ashes will be sprinkled on our forehead while either of these words are said loudly once to everyone instead of individually;

Remember that you are dust and unto dust you shall return (Gen 3:19).

Or

"Repent and believe in the Gospel" (Mark 1:15),

These words are not flattering words. We do not want to be reminded that we are mortal, we do not like to be reminded of our failings and our need for repentance.

But then, Lent is a season to "remember", to repent and reconnect with God in a profound way.

The ashes we shall receive today will remind us of at least five things.

I. Our Originality:

We are created by God from the dust of the earth (Genesis 2:7). We did not will ourselves into existence and so we are not independent or able to be without God.

II. Our vanity:

No matter how good and how beautiful we look, we are dust. Whatever is graceful and glorious in us comes only from God, what is underneath our beauty is being put on our forehead today to remind us that everything good in us comes from the Lord (Psalm 34:2, James 1:17; 2 Corinthians 3:5).

III. Frailty and iniquity

As we receive ashes on our forehead, we are being reminded that we are all sinners, in need of mercy. Lent is a time for us to shift focus from other people's lives, their mistakes and misdeeds, it is a time to focus on ourselves, our sins, our need for forgiveness and grace.

To say like the Psalmist "my offences truly I know them, my sin is always before me."

So the ashes we receive becomes a sign of our own contrition (Job 42:3-6, Jer 6:26, Dan 9:3; Jonah 3:6; Luke 10:13, Heb 9:13).

Our anger should not be at the fault of others but for our sins. It is the time to tear our hearts and not another person's garment.

IV. Mortality:

These ashes remind us that our mortal lives shall end one day, dust shall return to dust, ashes to ashes. This is a day my name will be called and I won't be in position to respond, a day I will close my eyes and open it at the other side, in eternity. A day that must surely come.

This is a day we ought to always keep in mind and prepare adequately for (Sirach 7:36).

V. Reality of Hell:

Ashes are produced from the effect of fire. These ashes remind us of the reality of hell for all those who by their own free will rebelled against God, all those who reject His love and His offer of salvation.

Thanks be to God, by the sign of the cross on our forehead, we are being reassured that through faith in the redemptive suffering and death of our Lord Jesus, we are assured of mercy and are set free from eternal damnation and shall rise again in glory to share with Christ the Happiness of eternal life which He won for us.

As we receive Ashes today, let us see this season as an opportunity to remember the truth about who we really are and who we are called to be and to draw nearer to God through fervent prayers, penance and alms giving.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, I acknowledge that I am dust and ashes and whatever is good in me is an evidence of your glory in me, help me so to live that when dust shall return to dust, what is immortal in dust shall not be deprived of your presence for ever, Amen.