

The “Repent, and believe in the Gospel” is not only the beginning of Christian life but accompanies it throughout, endures, is renewed and spreads, branching out into all its expressions. Every day is a favorable moment of grace because everyday presses us to give ourselves to Jesus, to trust in Him, to abide in Him, to share his lifestyle, to learn true love from Him, to follow Him in the daily fulfillment of the Father’s Will, the one great law of life. Everyday, even when it is fraught with difficulties and toil, weariness and setbacks, even when we are tempted to leave the path of the following of Christ and withdraw into ourselves, into our selfishness, without realizing our need to open ourselves to the love of God in Christ...

The favorable moment of grace in Lent also reveals its spiritual significance to us in the ancient formula: “Remember, man, you are dust and to dust you will return” which the priest says as he places a little ash on our foreheads. Thus we are referred back to the dawn of human history when the Lord told Adam, after the original sin: “In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Gen. 3:19). Here, the word of God reminds us of our frailty, indeed, of our death, which is the extreme form. Before the innate fear of the end and even sooner in the context of a culture which in so many ways tends to censure the reality and the human experience of death, the Lenten Liturgy, on the one hand, reminds us of death, inviting us to realism and wisdom; but, on the other, impels above all to understand the unexpected newness that the Christian faith releases from the reality of death itself.

Man is dust and to dust he shall return, but dust is precious in God’s eyes because God created man, destining him to immortality. Hence the Liturgical formula, “Remember, man, you are dust and to dust you will return”, finds the fullness of its meaning in reference to the new Adam, Christ. The Lord Jesus also chose freely to share with every human being the destiny of weakness, in particular through His death on the cross; but this very death the culmination of His love for the Father and for humanity, was the way to the glorious Resurrection, through which Christ became a source of grace given to all who believe in Him, who are made to share in divine life itself. This life that will have no end had already begun in the earthly faze of our existence but it will be brought to completion after “the resurrection of the flesh”. The little action of the imposition of ashes reveals to us the unique riches of its meaning. It is an invitation to spend the Lenten season as a more conscious and intense immersion in Christ’s Paschal Mystery in His death and Resurrection, through participation in the Eucharist and in the life of charity, which is born from the Eucharist in which it also finds its fulfillment. With the imposition of ashes we renew our commitment to following Jesus, to letting ourselves be transformed by His Paschal Mystery, to overcoming evil and to doing good, in order to make our former self, linked to sin die and to give birth to our “new nature”, transformed by God’s Grace.



****(excerpted from: www.wf-f.org)

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Ash Wednesday



While making the sign of the cross on each persons forehead with ashes the priests says...

“Remember, man, you are dust and to dust you will return”

Genesis 3:19

Biblical Significance of Ash Wednesday

*The liturgical imposition of ashes on Ash Wednesday is a sacramental, not a sacrament, and in the Roman Catholic understanding of the term the ashes themselves are also a sacramental. The ashes are blessed according to various rites proper to each liturgical tradition, sometimes involving the use of Holy Water. In most liturgies for Ash Wednesday, the penitential psalms are read; Psalm 50 is especially associated with this day. The service also often includes a corporate confession rite. Being a sacramental in the Roman Catholic Church, ashes may be given to anyone who wishes to receive them. The day is observed by fasting, abstinence from meat, and repentance—a day of contemplating one’s transgressions. The day before Ash Wednesday is known as Shrove Tuesday or Mardi Gras (Fat Tuesday), the last day of the Carnival season. *(excerpted from: //en.wikipedia.org)

Originally Ash Wednesday was called dies cinerum (day of ashes) and is mentioned in the earliest copies of the Gregorian Sacramentary, and it probably dates from at least the 8th Century. One of the earliest descriptions of Ash Wednesday is found in the writings of the Anglo-Saxon abbot Aelfric (955-1020). In his Lives of the Saints, he writes, “We read in the books both in the Old Law and in the New that men who repented of their sins bestrewed themselves with ashes and clothed their bodies with sackcloth...” Aelfric suggests the pouring of ashes on one’s body and the dressing in sackcloth was an outer manifestation of inner repentance or mourning. This distinctive worship can first be traced back to the days of Job, who having been rebuked by God, confesses, “Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes (Job 42:6). *(excerpted from: www.orlutheran.com)

***Ashes (and “sackcloth,” or rough, plain clothing, usually of camel’s hair) traditionally represents mourning (2 Sam. 13:19; Gen. 37:34), repentance (Job 42:6; Matt. 11:21; Dan. 9:3; Joel 1:8, 13;), and the judgment of God (Rev. 6:12). When King Ahasuerus ordered all Jews to be killed, Mordecai “tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and... cried out with a loud and bitter cry.” The Jews throughout the land prayed “with great mourning...with fasting, weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes” (Esther 4:1-3). This was for the dual purpose of mourning for their coming death and of demonstrating their repentance to God, pleading with Him to spare them from his judgment. When Jonah preached God’s coming judgment against Nineveh, the pagan king of Nineveh and his subjects understood that if a nation repents from its evil ways, God may withhold His Judgment (Jer. 18:7-10), so they repented and prayed that God would spare them.

So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them. Then word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe and covered

himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. He caused it to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, “Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water. Let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish?” Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it (Jonah 3:5-10).

***(excerpted from: answers.org)

Reflections

***The general audience of Pope Benedict XVI on Wednesday, Feb. 17, 2010 (Ash Wednesday) began by saying that Ash Wednesday is the beginning of the Lenten Journey, a journey that takes 40 days and brings us to the joy of the Lord’s Pasch. On this spiritual journey we are not alone because the Church accompanies and supports us from the outset with the word of God, which contains a programme of spiritual life and penitential commitment, and with the grace of the sacraments...the first appeal is for conversion, a word to be understood with its extraordinary gravity, grasping the surprising newness it releases. The appeal to conversion, in fact, lays bare and denounces the facile superficiality that all too often marks our lives. To repent (or convert) is to change direction in the journey of life; not, however, by means of a small adjustment, but with a true and proper about turn. Conversion means swimming against the tide, where the “tide” is the superficial lifestyle, inconsistent and deceptive, that often sweeps us along, overwhelms us and makes us slaves to evil or at any rate prisoners of moral mediocrity. With conversion, on the other hand we are aiming for the high standard of Christian living, we entrust ourselves to the living and personal Gospel which is Jesus Christ. He is our final goal and the profound meaning of conversion, He is the path on which all are called to walk through life, letting themselves be illumined by His light and sustained by his power which moves our steps. In this way conversion expresses his most splendid and fascinating Face: it is not a mere moral decision that rectifies our conduct in life, but rather a choice of faith that wholly involves us in close communion with Jesus as a real and living Person. To repent and to believe in the Gospel are not to different things or in some way only juxtaposed, but express the same reality. Repentance is the total “Yes” of those who consign their whole life to the Gospel responding freely to Christ who first offers himself to mankind as the Way, the Truth, and the Life, as the only One who sets us free and saves us. This is the precise meaning with which, according to the Evangelist Mark, Jesus begins preaching the “Gospel of God”: The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the Gospel” (Mark 1:15).