



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

## **Ash Wednesday**

### ***Refrain from sin rather than chocolate***

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

The penitential season, in the public mind, comes wreathed in gloom and portraits of personal misery. It is a time when people proudly announce the source of their suffering as a dearth of chocolate or alcohol and are greeted with sympathy and temptation in about equal measure.

The very name Ash Wednesday conjures up pictures of quaint antique society going about in sackcloth and ashes, now quite outdated, manifesting a very public display of our deprivation and sorrow.

Jesus is quite clear that this is not to be the case with us. We are not to publicise our disciplines. When fasting we are to be cheerful and not to advertise our piety. If we do that we have our reward already. The offering we make is in the heart and to God.

Of course what we do today is very significant. We receive ashes on our head with the words of Holy Scripture reminding us of our mortality.

‘Dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return.’ That is the beginning of the wholesale spiritual audit that is Lent.

Reminded of our frailty, our fragile mortality, all becomes once more rightly seen as a gift of God. Knowing our physical origin and end as 'dust' puts all into perspective. Knowing that is only half the story and that, in creation, God has animated that dust with the breath of life and offered to it an eternal destiny is the journey that will take us through the mystery of the Passion and into the miracle of the Third Day.

For this is the same dust that the Word of God will come to inhabit and dignify and take through the gates of death into eternity into the Presence of the Father.

Standing before the altar, where that miracle is memorialised and made present, we receive the ash. We walk away into a period of reflection – giving thanks for the miracle of our existence, conscious of the time of our earthly dwelling and filled with desire to rededicate it to God's glory. This means discipline/discipling anew. It may mean acts of abstinence though it is more important to learn to refrain from sin than from chocolate. Fasting is but part of that regaining control of appetites and refocusing the soul.

If you are a critical person – bind your mouth until you can say something encouraging or uplifting.

If you are a greedy person do not let your taste buds tyrannise your stomach.

If you are a lazy person then rediscover the joy of going the extra mile with someone and the fruits of the simplest commitments.

If you are a proud person, look in the mirror or, better still, kneel often before the Cross of Christ. You will discover you have plenty to be humble about.

Do what you are asked to do for the Lord willingly and without resentment and without a sense of self-righteousness.

For us, as followers of Christ, Lent should be a glorious time of rediscovery of ourselves as God intended us to be. Lent should be a real springtime for the soul in which we can clear out the rubbish that clogs up the temple of the soul. It is a time for dethroning the false idol of self and matter from the altar of our hearts and offering Christ back His rightful place there.

When we come to the Penitential evening later on in this holy season, there should be a personal and corporate sense of catharsis, of cleansing, of renewal and revival. We should leave the confessional with a metaphorical spring in our step which is almost physical and a new appetite for the things of God.

Our daily reading, our prayer life, our community life, our evangelism should all be re-energised by the discipline of this renewed encounter with the reality of our Faith.

The community that meets together in the pre-dawn dark of Easter Day should not be the same one that meets here tonight. Nor should it be one that has dragged itself to the altar ready for a brief hurrah ready to slump back into the accustomed sloth of ordinary time but one that is renewed, invigorated, enthusiastic for the Gospel and ready to go out and give our

lives to that sovereign purpose on which, when dust turn truly turns again to dust, we will be judged.

Rejoice in Lent and may it be a time when, wisely pruned, your soul will blossom and bear fruit in joyful abundance.

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