

SERMON FOR ASH WEDNESDAY 2016

"Be reconciled to God"

Lent gives us the opportunity to both deepen our knowledge of God and reflect on our need of God. Holy poverty is recognising our need of, our dependence on God. In a few minutes time I will bless these ashes and invite people to come forward for the Imposition of Ashes on the forehead. The ashes are made from the palm crosses of last year's Palm Sunday celebration. The ashing is both a symbol and a reminder of who and what we are. Lent calls us to a renewed awareness of our vocation as Christian people. We are marked with the sign of the cross in ash reminding us of our baptism and new life in Christ made possible through the cross of Christ. A life where our body dies and our souls rise in Christ. The symbolic ashing tells us that we are a marked people. In baptism we were marked with the sign of the cross on our forehead always with water but perhaps some with oil as well. At baptism we died with Christ in order to rise up and live in his new life offered to us through the sacrament of initiation. Even though we have been baptised we are still inclined to sin.

The ashen cross reminds us that we died with Christ but also it symbolises our continuing penitence as we long to be reconciled to God. The ashen cross reminds us that the Church is imperfect, at the same time the Church expresses its need for repentance. The ashen cross is reminding us that humanity is nothing without God. Indeed it was the very cross of God made man, Jesus Christ, which redeemed and saved humanity – *".....there was none other good enough to pay the price of sin"*. We are then marked men and women. The symbolic act of ashing reminds us that we are a penitent people seeking reconciliation with God. The ashen cross is to be borne with humility and joy because it tells us that we are God's children and he loved us before we were born. A God who gave his son to die upon the cross for us, the cross of which we can never be ashamed, and this Lent gives us the opportunity to deepen and grow in the knowledge of that mystery.

*The Ven Douglas McKittrick
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