

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

Dear Parishioners:

As you know the Season of Lent began this past week on Ash Wednesday. Every time Ash Wednesday comes around I am amazed by the effect it has on some people. Even though it is not a holy day of obligation there are many people who come to Mass and to receive ashes. This is good and as it should be. Receiving the ashes is a sign that we accept the call to repentance and renew our commitment to Christ. What surprises me is the number of people we see on Ash Wednesday who want to receive ashes that we rarely see in church at any other time.

Typically, the week of Ash Wednesday the phone in the rectory rings off the hook with people wanting to know when ashes will be given out. In a previous assignment, when I told people the Mass times for Ash Wednesday a few even said things like "I just want ashes." *Apparently for them receiving ashes is more important than receiving the Body of Christ in the Holy Eucharist.* One year I had a man come to the rectory at 9 o'clock at night asking for ashes. Every priest I know has had similar experiences and none of us has quite figured out why non-practicing Catholics still want to receive ashes on Ash Wednesday.

My own theory is that people who almost never come to Mass still want to be included in the Church and for them receiving the ashes is a way of "keeping up their membership." I wish they understood that the ritual involves a lot more than that. Receiving the ashes while hearing the words that are said, "**Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return,**" is intended to remind us of our mortality.

As a result of Adam's sin, sooner or later, we will all die. The ashes of Ash Wednesday are a sign calling us to focus on where our lives are leading. Truly, all the material things we see around us and we ourselves will one day be dust. All that we will take from this life are our souls and the love we have for the Lord and one another.

Some people try to avoid thinking about death. Indeed, our whole culture seeks to deny its reality as if not facing it will make it go away. This is not a Christian attitude. The Bible teaches us that because of Adam's sin, death is now an inevitable part of life. But for the faithful, death is not the end. The Scriptures tell us that love is stronger than death and our Lord Jesus proved it by His resurrection.

We observe Ash Wednesday and Lent because they remind us to think and pray about where our lives are leading us. They're leading us to Easter and resurrection with Jesus Christ. And we want to be ready.

With my prayers,

Fr. Conley