

Ash Wednesday

is a great inheritance for us from the Biblical past. It is like all great symbols, in that it is impossible and improper to spell out its whole meaning; but we can respectfully say that ash eloquently represents to us the fact of decay and death, which afflicts all that we know with our five senses; ash is the final fact of the sensual world, from matchwood to diamond, from cathedral to compost, and from fatal bacillus to the beloved human form.

That good and evil *both* end in ashes is partly painful, but partly immensely consoling. Much of our capacity for evil depends on our forgetting painful truths like this one, and our coming to receive these ashes on our head is a sign that we do not want to live false lives, but true ones. We want to seek real ways of being human, and find our way to genuine and enduring goodness.

The consolation can only come, if we accept the pain.

You could say that Ash Wednesday represents our searching for the true God in the full knowledge of our own slavery to falsehood.

Intercessions

Recognising that falsehood of any kind defiles us and hinders us from our true desire, we turn to the one who made us, who alone can tell us why we are precious and capable of goodness, and worth more than a handful of ashes.

We seek the grace to find and keep the humility of those who fast. Hunger teaches us how fragile is our contentment, how easily we can lose our sense of well-being and the self-sufficiency which makes it easy to ignore the needs of others. Lord, help us to enter the wilderness, and fast with you.

We seek the spirit of prayer, truthful and kindly. May this Lent enable us to quarry out a quiet place from the noise and choking busyness of our lives. May God open our hearts and enter them.

We seek to rediscover the friendship and sharing which should mark the Church. Generosity and forgiveness, affection and sympathy, active kindness and free giving will remind us who has made us, and renew his image in us.

God and Father of us all,
send forth your light and your truth
to guide our steps through the desert,
in which you will teach us your Law, and show us your love:
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen