

## Ash Wednesday 2019

“Behold, now is a very acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.” My friends, we are here once again in the time of Lent. Specifically, today we come to turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel. We come to remember that we are dust, and to dust we will return. It seem a very morbid kind of thought, I know. But these ashes today are actually a symbol of hope and freedom.

In the Christian West during the middle ages, a certain phrase became very popular - first in monasteries, and then throughout the Church. This phrase in Latin is, “Memento mori.” Which means, “Remember death” or “Remember that you will die.” Again, this doesn’t seem like a very happy thing to remember, especially if we are looking through the eyes of the world. We are terrified of death in the world. We don’t like to talk about it. But for us Christians, death is no reason to be scared. This is why the monks used to greet each other with that phrase, “Memento mori.” It is the same thing we do today. We put ashes on our foreheads to remember that we will die. We do not do this to depress ourselves or to be morbid. No, we do it to remind ourselves of the truth of our lives. We are not here to live some earthly life that starts, ends, and that’s it. We are here to show the world the life that really matters. This is a life lived for the glory of God and for the love of our sisters and brothers.

If we remember that we are dust, and to dust we will return, we can be less distracted by the things of the world. We do not have to

worry about saving up huge amounts of money. It is not as important to be powerful or influential as the world sees it. A big house in a fancy neighborhood will not be where we spend eternity. Remember, sisters and brothers, “Memento mori.” This is not something to make us sad. It is something that reminds us of what is important. It keeps us from being like the hypocrites who do things just for the attention of the world. This way of living sets us free. It helps us return to the Lord with our whole heart (Joel). We are not people of this world. No, “We are ambassadors for Christ!” (2 Cor).

We are dust, and we look forward to the new life that God has prepared for us. So, we fast, and we give alms, and we pray, so that we can draw closer to the Lord. This season of Lent is certainly one of penance, but it is definitely one of joy. Jesus has conquered sin and death, and his victory is our own. This is why the Lord tells us who are starting this time of conversion today: “Anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to be fasting.” Our internal preparations help us to show to the world that this is not all there is. There is a whole life beyond this one. It is true that we will die, but it is also true that in Christ Jesus we might truly live!

So, “blow the trumpet in Zion! Proclaim a fast, call an assembly; Gather the people, notify the congregation” (Joel). May we prepare ourselves, the dust who God has called to be his own people. May our Lenten practices allow us to proclaim the Gospel with all our hearts and with all our lives. My brothers and sisters, be marked

today and remember: **“Memento Mori.”** You are dust, and to dust you will return. Turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel. Be people who live for the true life that lasts forever. **“Behold, now is a very acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”**