

ASH WEDNESDAY, YEAR B, FEBRUARY 17, 2021

How many of you have seen the Swiffer commercial that says, "I never worried about dust until I found out what it's made of – dust mite droppings and dead skin cells. That commercial aptly describes what we are reminded of on Ash Wednesday that "we are dust and to dust shall we return." We are dust...and each and every day, our bodies or our skin sheds dusty particles everywhere. Household dust really can be, in a quite literal sense, a small symbol of our mortality.

And what happens in your house, like in every other house in the world, is that that dust, imperceptibly, builds up. Day after day, almost without notice the dust builds up. And then, all of a sudden, we look up one day and say, "Wow this house is dirty, and we need to do a little cleaning!!"

Well, that's what Ash Wednesday is...a day where we get the chance to admit that we ALL need to do a little cleaning particularly soul cleaning. We have forgotten how it is we should live and have forgotten how quickly the dust in our lives piles up.

What Ash Wednesday is all about is an invitation for us to start REALLY LIVING again: to make the choice to take 40 days and step back out of the same old same old of life...and REconnect with God...and REconnect with others...and examine our lives, where we are, and where life is leading us.

And how to we start really living again? One of the primary things we need to do is to stop getting caught up in our own interests and concerns. When we only look at what our particular needs are we become more and more self centered. Lent is the season to reassess what has value, what does not, and how much we offer up to God. It's about stopping feeling sorry for ourselves and finding solidarity with those who are in need and who are less fortunate than us. It is weaning ourselves from our dependencies on things and awakening to those imperceptible things where our treasure truly is such as kindness, gratitude, hope, joy and love. You know, indifference is a real temptation for all of us and we need to hear the voices of those who not only trouble our conscience but pushes us out of our self concerns. Ash Wednesday gives us the opportunity to start taking stock of the things we don't like in ourselves so we can use the 40 days of Lent to improve on our relationship with God and others.

"What are you giving up for Lent?" It's a question a lot of people will get these next few days. If you want to change your body, perhaps giving up unhealthy foods is the way to go. But if you want to change your heart, a harder fast is needed. It is a time to fast from things that distract us and concentrate on things that turn us to God. So with that in mind let us do some spring cleaning that gets us out of ourselves by doing the following:

- Fast from hurting words and say kind words
- Fast from sadness and be filled with gratitude
- Fast from anger and be filled with patience
- Fast from pessimism and be filled with hope
- Fast from worries and have trust in God
- Fast from complaints and contemplate simplicity
- Fast from pressures and be prayerful
- Fast from bitterness and fill your hearts with joy
- Fast from selfishness and be compassionate to others

Fast from grudges and be reconciled
Fast from words and be silent so you can listen

As you begin your Lenten experience remember to fast from those things that keep us from God and feast on those things that restore and renew our relationship with God. Let us use the season of Lent to be refreshed and renewed. Amen.