

Significant Problem—Last Day in the Garden Genesis 3:19

When President Roosevelt said: “it is a date that will live in infamy” he was speaking of the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Next to Good Friday, today is the most somber day in the Church year. Ash Wednesday is the day when we remember that we are dust and to dust we shall return.

Today we are remembering an infamous day in human history. It is a day that created a significant problem for us: To dust you shall return.

That statement is a direct quote from Genesis 3:19: “You are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

God is addressing Adam immediately after the fall into sin in the Garden of Eden. He is telling Adam of all the negative consequences of his and Eve’s disobedience. They had eaten the fruit of the tree from which God had instructed them not to eat. God had warned Adam and Eve that if they ate that fruit they would die. But what did they do? They gave in to temptation and ate it anyway.

From that day on, death followed, just as God said it would. The words “to dust you shall return” pointed to Adam’s pending physical death and the decay. Adam was formed from the ground, and Adam

would return to the ground. “You are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

There’s also a spiritual death that the sin of Adam and Eve brought into the world that day. It is eternal separation from God -- banishment from Him, His love, His mercy. Adam would live the rest of his days remembering those sobering words from God: “You are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

The bad news is that you and I face the same problem that Adam did. Paul writes in Romans 5, “Therefore, . . . sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned” (v. 12). What God said to Adam applies to us: “you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

That’s a problem! But we don’t like to think about it, do we? Our own death is not something we like to contemplate. It makes us uncomfortable. The temptation is to go through life childishly pretending that if I can see it, if I don’t think about it, it’s not there. The danger in not realizing we are in trouble, is that we also don’t realize we need someone to save us.

And so we gather here on this Ash Wednesday and repent of our sin. We admit before God and one another our sinfulness. We express our sorrow for

our sin. We ask God to forgive our sin. We ask God to help us change our sinful life to live one more pleasing to Him.

Even more important than you remembering that you are dust is the fact that God remembers that you are dust. In Psalm 103, the psalmist tells us that God “knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust” (Ps 103:14). And in the Scriptures, whenever God remembers His people, He always acts on behalf of His people, to bless them.

In fact, God had already remembered us even before He told Adam, “You are dust, and to dust you shall return.” Four verses before God spoke these words to Adam, God spoke to Satan and assured the tempter that He was going to send one who would crush his head.

Remembering that we are dust, God acted on our behalf. He came here and lived among us in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus took upon Himself all sin. He himself went into the earth, into the dust of the ground, as He was buried in a tomb. Worst of all, He endured the penalty of spiritual death there on the cross as He was abandoned by His Father and cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mt 27:46).

But He would not remain in the dust of the earth. On the third day, He rose from the grave just as He predicted He would. And so will you. On the day Christ returns, you and all believers in Him will rise from the dust of the earth with new, glorified bodies no longer subject to sin or death.

There is an idiom you may know. Not and idiot, though you may know one of those as well – an idiom, an expression. When a racer falls way behind, we might say he got “Left in the dust.”

We give thanks that God has not “left us in the dust.” He has not abandoned us in our problem. He has not left us behind. Just the opposite is the case. He came here in the person of Jesus Christ to make certain that we would be lifted from the dust of the earth. Just as Christ rose physically from the grave, so we, too, will join Him “in a resurrection like his” (Rom 6:5). God will not leave us in the dust. Amen.