

God, Life, and Everything
You are Dust

Did you get your ashes? Hurry, there's still time, because today is my favorite Holy Day - Ash Wednesday.

But you knew that, didn't you?

The real question is, do you know *why* it's my favorite Holy Day - or why we put those ashes on our forehead? Just in case you don't, I'm here to help.

First, a little background. Each Ash Wednesday throughout much of the Christian faith worldwide, the observant receive a cross of ash on their foreheads to begin the holy season of Lent. When we put those ashes on worshipers - usually with the thumb, in case you were interested - the priest says, "Remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

Dust? Really? Isn't that kind of morbid?

Here's the deal. Lent is a penitential season. That means it's a forty-day period for us to ponder the fact that we are not only mortal (we're not God), but we are fallible, sinful, and sometimes outright evil.

Lent reminds us to do more than merely give lip service to the notion that we are "fallen." It reminds us to seriously look at who we are, to see how we have strayed from God's ideal, how we are weak and can't possibly make it to the Kingdom of God on our own.

In short, Lent reminds us to live an examined life.

And those ashes - which are just a stand-in for dust - coupled with those memorable words "Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return" put an edge on it. I love that edge. I love that I am dust, that I will someday die. That my family, my friends, my enemies, my strangers, all will die.

That dust, in a strange way, unites us because, if there is nothing else we all have in common, we do have this: we will all die. We will all return to the dust.

That means that all my efforts to make money, to be a success, to be popular, to win arguments, to root the Rangers into a Stanley Cup... they all are dust. So are the billions that a giant corporation (or just a mega-rich industrialist) owns. So are the trophies that all the child athletes win.

You pick it - it's just future dust waiting to happen.

But why do I sound so chipper about this? Why do I love it?

For one thing, the fact that we are all, in the end, the same dust, means that we are all connected, like it or not. You and I belong together, if not in this life, then the next.

The other thing I love about being dust is that I don't have to be perfect. I don't have to be great or famous or even particularly accomplished. In the end, none of that matters.

What matters is seeing our connectedness, seeing God's handiwork in the dust made human, dust made into mountains and rivers and crops. We are all in this together, like it or not. And in the end, when we are all truly dust, we may mingle in ways we can never imagine today.

So remember you are dust - it's great news!

And if you haven't gotten your ashes today, feel invited to join us at 10:00 AM 7:00 PM today at St. James (4526 Albany Post Road). You are welcome.