

## Homily - Ash Wednesday 2024

“Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

We begin this season of Lent with a sobering reminder.

Life on this earth, our life, is finite, and in time we will have to confront that fact.

This can be a difficult, even alarming, idea to contemplate.

And yet our tradition, our faith, brings it front and center as we enter into this season of penance, a season that is both a time of challenge and of hope.

Challenge, because the Lord invites us, in this time of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, to set aside any of those things in our lives that have become obstacles to his love and the full manifestation of his will for our destiny.

Hope, because this process of purification isn't aimless - in fact, it is meant to prepare us for something incredibly joyful: our encounter with Our Lord in his Resurrection this coming Easter.

But to begin, we start with the fact of our future death.

Why? Because if we acknowledge that this world is passing away, then it becomes much easier, infinitely more reasonable, to live for the next.

If this world, and our life in it, is passing away, then the grief we feel as we set aside our old attachments and let go of the superficial things we have clung to is really only a small thing, in the grand scheme of eternity.

If we are dust, then why worry so much about things that will barely matter in the end?

But we should know that there's more to be said.

That's not all there is to the story - because the story of our lives, in the eyes of God, doesn't end with our death.

In a way, if we truly embrace the hope and the message of his Gospel, then that moment of transition is really just the beginning of our real life, and all that came before is merely a prologue, setting the scene for a glorious eternity.

Today, this first day of fasting, starts us on the path of self-renunciation that should carry us through the whole of Lent.

The ashes that we receive will likewise serve as a reminder of our destiny as we enter into this process, both a sign of the sorrow that we should feel as we turn from sin, and the hope that we have in the mercy of God.

Now is the time that each of us should resolve to live this Lent well, and prayerfully. If you haven't yet made a resolution for how to commit to the pillars of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, this is the moment to do so.

Invite the Lord to be with you, to strengthen you for this time shared with him in these spiritual deserts, and allow him to lead you to the true freedom that awaits.

And remember why we are here. Not just to be seen, or to carry out some simple obligation, but to truly empty our hearts to receive the love of God, here in his sacred presence.

To remember that we are dust, and yet we are each treasured and beloved from before the first moment of our existence, called to embrace a life lived for eternity.

That is the destination of our Lenten journey - and now we take the first step.