

HOMILY FOR ASH WEDNESDAY – YEAR B

Many times when I was growing up my mom and dad would say to me, “you can’t always get what you want.” I learned this lesson in many ways in a family of seven. I remember I wanted a bike for my birthday. As much as my parents wanted to get me a bike, I had to wait until they could afford one. My mom and dad taught me and my siblings how to sacrifice for others and to be grateful for things we did have. They would remind us to be thankful for food, clothing and a roof over our head. These lessons were not always easy ones to learn in a family of seven.



Looking back on my childhood my parents were good examples of what it was to trust God with everything. As we come to celebrate Ash Wednesday Mass we begin our journey through Lent to the Easter celebrations. Lent is that 40-day journey when we renew our trust in a God who provides for our every need. We pray that we desire what God wants for us. Through the traditional Lenten practices of prayer, fasting and almsgiving we learn that what God desires for us is our salvation in Jesus Christ.

Repentance is needed, because we are fallen human beings who act, think and speak sometimes in undignified ways. But, Christ is calling us back to our original innocence in the Garden of Eden before the Fall of Adam and Eve. Christ appeals to the human heart to remind us of who we truly are and that we are not the sum of our sins. This way of re-thinking about who we truly are is beautifully encapsulated in St. John Paul II's *Theology of the Body*. Due to our fallen human nature and tendency to sin and “use” others, we need a constant purification, repentance and conversion from the times we abused the spousal meaning of the body or forget to give ourselves as a gift to the other and love others for the sake of themselves.

The ashes we receive in the form of a cross on our foreheads on this day remind us of the urgency of growing in our relationship with God and others. All the lessons of faith that we learned in our childhood from our parents taught us those habits that help us to grow in virtue. Those habits of doing the right thing to bring about what is good for others we do because we love God and God loves us. Lent is a time of starting over and recommitting ourselves to deeper conversion of heart and mind to Christ. When we hear those powerful words “remember you are dust and to dust you will return” we are reminded that the only way to share in the risen life of Christ is to embrace dying to self. Let's take serious the call to conversion and prepare ourselves through our Lenten practices to receive more fully the love of Christ alive in our hearts. May our God be praised!



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