

Ash Wednesday

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Date: 17 February 2021

Preacher: Fr. Wade Miller

[0 : 00] Ash Wednesday is a time to reflect on our immortality. Remember thou art dust, and to dust thou shalt return. This reality of death should be vivid in our minds, especially with all that has transpired this past year.

Around this time last year, we were just beginning to understand COVID-19 and how deadly its potential. It might seem a bit morbid to think of death, but death reminds us of the sickness that we all carry inside of us.

And that disease is much deadlier than the coronavirus. The sickness we all have is sin, and sin brings about death.

Sin is that which makes us believe that we are our own gods. Sin is that which is contrary to holiness and righteousness.

Sin is that which turns beauty into ugliness and leaves us as occupants at the morn. The breaking of just one commandment results in alienation with our holy God, our creator, and therefore death becomes our future.

[1 : 23] And this is the truth, albeit a very sobering and vivid truth, but it is the truth nonetheless.

But for Christians, although Ash Wednesday is a very somber day, it is also a day of joy. You see, in Jesus Christ, death does not have the last word.

Ugliness and despair do not define our existence. Being six feet under the ground is not the end of the journey for us. Yes, God hates sin, and that's why he did something about it.

God took our flesh. God took our flesh upon himself so that he might restore beauty, holiness, and righteousness.

He took our place by paying the ultimate price, by dying on a cross as the perfect and sinless sacrifice for the sake of the whole world.

[2 : 34] But his lifeless body did not stay in a tomb. He rose from that grave triumphant over death.

He then took our flesh into the realm of eternity, into the realm of heaven. And now he imparts his immortal life, his eternal life to you.

Creatures made up of body and soul. And our bodies will be raised from the earth, from the dust of death, to share in his eternal life forever and ever.

Amen. But on this day, we are to remember that sin brings about death. And so we are to prepare for our end.

Life is a perpetual training for eternity. That's what life is. And so we pray. We fast. We read the scriptures.

[3 : 42] We strive to then live by the word of God. And we receive the gift of immortality as we receive Christ in the Holy Eucharist. We hear our Lord's absolution.

And then we live as creatures freed from the bondage of sin and death. People who have been raised. Who have been buried and raised again through the waters of holy baptism.

We live in the faith and hope of the resurrection because Jesus has overcome death. And that's the good news that gives us joy, even in the midst of taking time out in our lives to think upon our own life and our death.

And this new life we have in Christ, it's not a mere outward display of piety. As we heard from the prophet Joel, we are to rend our hearts, not our garments.

As Jesus warned in the gospel reading this evening, we don't merely play the part. We seek to live in light of God's word. We store up treasures in heaven, not here on earth.

[4 : 58] We practice a life of repentance, a life of fasting, a life of mercy, and yes, a life of joy. Even in the veil of tears because of the hope that we have in Jesus Christ.

We live a life of joy knowing what the world sees as the end. Death itself. It has been transformed as a new beginning for all who put their faith and their trust in Christ.

Not in themselves, but in the God. The God who took upon human flesh. The God who overcame death in the grave. The God who rose victorious.

The world scoffs at such belief because they believe that life merely ends in death. And there's no hope beyond the grave.

But we know of the life beyond the grave. Because we know that Jesus lives. And all that are in him will live and does live even this day.

[6 : 11] Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.