

Homily for Ash Wednesday – Year A

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today we begin our Lenten journey with ashes on our foreheads and a simple but powerful reminder: **“Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”**

Ash Wednesday is not about shame. It is about truth. It is about clarity. It is about coming home.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus speaks about three traditional Lenten practices: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. But he focuses less on the actions themselves and more on the heart behind them. He warns us: **“Do not perform righteous deeds in order to be seen.”**

In other words, Lent is not a performance. It is not spiritual self-improvement for applause. It is not about looking holy. It is about becoming honest.

Ashes symbolize mortality. They remind us that life is fragile and time is limited. We do not live forever on this earth. But ashes also symbolize repentance. In the Old Testament, people covered themselves in ashes as a sign that they wanted to turn back to God.

When we receive ashes today, we are saying: I am not self-sufficient, I am not in control,

I need mercy. And that is not a weakness. That is the beginning of freedom.

The first reading from the Prophet Joel gives us God's invitation: **"Return to me with your whole heart."** Not part of your heart, not your Sunday heart, and not your public heart. Your whole heart.

Lent is not primarily about giving up chocolate or social media. Those can be helpful. But the deeper question is, what is keeping my heart divided? Is it resentment? Is it a distraction? Is it pride? Is it fear? God does not demand perfection. He asks for honesty. **"Return to me."**

In the Gospel, Jesus repeats something beautiful: **"Your Father who sees in secret will repay you."**

There is a **"secret place"** in every person — the place where no one else sees. Your private thoughts. Your hidden struggles. Your quiet fears. Your unspoken prayers. That is where God looks.

Lent invites us into that secret place, to pray not to impress, but to connect. To fast not to suffer, but to be free. To give not to be praised, but to love. And when we live from that place, something changes. We become simpler. Lighter. More real.

Notice something profound: the ashes are placed on our foreheads in the shape of a cross.

The cross reminds us that our mortality is not meaningless. Our weakness is not wasted. Our sin is not final.

Lent is a journey — but it is not a journey toward despair. It is a journey toward Easter. From ashes... to resurrection. From repentance... to joy. From death... to life.

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today, as we receive ashes, we stand equal. No titles. No achievements. No status. Just beloved sinners in need of mercy. And that is exactly who Christ came for.

May this Lent be honest, quiet, sincere, and transformative.

Let us return to the Lord with our whole heart. And trust that the Father who sees in secret is already waiting for us with mercy. **Amen.**