

A Monthly Message from Pastor Mike and Mandy

Dear Parish Family,

After Adam's act of disobedience to God's command not to eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the Lord said to him " . . . dust you are and to dust you shall return." (Genesis 3: 19b NKJV) Every Ash Wednesday, as ashes are traced in the form of a cross on the forehead of each penitent, the pastor recites words that recall this text from Genesis, "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return." Another reminder of what the Lord said to Adam is found in the graveside committal service: " . . . earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust."

We are mortal beings, because death came into the world through Adam's sin, and we are one with Adam. Saint Paul speaks of the relationship between sin and death in his epistle to the Romans " . . . sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned . . ." (Romans 5: 12 NRSV) When we receive ashes on the forehead, we are reminded of both our sin and our death.

The sign of the cross imprinted on our foreheads with ashes reminds us that there is One who has overcome sin and death. This sign was traced on our foreheads at Baptism. At the naming of the Holy Trinity in the confession of sin, we may make the sign of the cross in remembrance of our Baptism. In the Sacrament we are united to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Saint Paul writes, "For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin." (Romans 6: 5-6 NRSV)

The liturgy of the Burial of the Dead embodies baptismal imagery, as the baptized one who has died now enters the heavenly inheritance promised in the Sacrament. One of the petitions in the prayers in the liturgy reads, “Grant that all who have been baptized with Christ’s death and resurrection may die to sin and rise to newness of life and that through the grave and gate of death we may pass with him to our joyful resurrection.” (LBW, Pew Edition, p. 209) When the pall, which represents the white baptismal garment, is placed over the casket as a reminder of Baptism, these words taken from Romans 6 are recited by the pastor, “When we were baptized in Christ Jesus, we were baptized into his death. We were buried therefore with him by Baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live a new life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.” (LBW, Pew Edition, p. 206)

Ash Wednesday and Lent are about sin and death. The Lord God addressed this question to the prophet, Ezekiel, when the prophet beheld the valley of bones, “Son of man, can these bones live?” (Ezekiel 37; 3 NKJV) Yes, by the power of God these bones can live. They come together, are clothed in flesh, and have life breathed into them as at the beginning of creation. As Israel was brought to life by the Spirit after the death of exile, so we have been revived by the selfsame Spirit in Holy Baptism, so that we may enter into resurrected life. Ash Wednesday and Lent are not only about sin and death but also about new life in Christ through His death and resurrection, remembered with the greatest solemnity in Holy Week and on Easter, the Resurrection of our Lord.

Flesh and blood, a pound of dust,

For us to live, it’s God who must.

During Lent let us turn to God in repentance so that we may receive the forgiveness of our sins. May this season remind us of sin and death but also of life in Jesus Christ, as we await the Queen of Feasts.

In Christ,

Pastor Michael Tavella
Pastor Amanda Grimmer