

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

“Remember, O Man...” Those words were spoken over you as the ashes you wear were scribed onto your face. “Remember.” When God calls you to remember, He is calling to you bring to mind a heavenly truth, an incontestable truth, a truth that stands for eternity. And this day/night He has called you to remember, and then called you “man.”

If you do as God bids, if you remember, O Man, then you remember the first man, the man from whom you are begotten. Remember, then, O Man, how that first man was made: “... the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.” From dust to life by the breath of God. The lifeless animated by that which proceeds from the mouth of God. Dust made flesh by the Word.

But that man born of dust and God’s breath fell. He yielded to temptation. He did what God commanded “Thou shalt not.” The very thing that could hurt him most he engaged intimately with – he took from it, placed it into his mouth, and it filled him. It defined him. You know the account. You know what happened. You are what you eat.

And you know what God declared: “Cursed is the ground for your sake; In toil you shall eat of it All the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, And you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread Till you return to the ground, For out of it you were taken; For dust you are, And to dust you shall return.”

So as the ashes you wear were applied to you, if you do as God directs, if you remember, if you remember the sin that comes with the name “man”, your name, then you remember the truth that you, like all men, are dust, and to dust shalt thou return. The sentence is horrible. Fire, consuming fire, leaves ashes. But with fire comes judgment.

So remember, O Man. Remember, and confess that just as you bear the traits of your earthly parents, so too do you bear the traits of that first man. And more than having inherited his sin, to that sin you have added every day. Remember, for the ashes you wear point to the consuming fire and the judgment that soon comes.

Remember, and repent. Turn from the ways of this fallen world. Put away the things of lust and greed, gluttony, envy, anger and unbelief. Hear the ancient cry of the Prophet Joel: “Turn to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping and with mourning. So rend your hearts, and not your garments.”

So it is that the Apostle John, the Apostle beloved of the Lord, the Apostle that reclined at the Lord’s breast at table, so it is that John writes “If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.” So too does the Apostle write “If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.”

Do not walk in darkness. Do not lie. Do not deny your sin. Repent. Repent sincerely. Repent by turning away from the things of which God says “Thou shalt not”, the very things that will hurt you most, the very things that your fallen flesh craves.

And hearken to the Word of the Prophet. For repentance that is only skin deep, repentance that only results in the tearing of one's outer garments, repentance that is for show, is repentance that leads to death. It leads to ashes. It leads to the consuming fire of the final judgment. So remember, O Man, that thou art dust, and to dust shalt thou return. The ashes on your forehead testify.

God, in His mercy, in love, did not leave the first man without hope. That hope came in the form of a promise, the promise of a Savior, the promise of One who would save men from their sins, and so from death and condemnation. To Him also do the ashes you wear testify, for the inscription that marks your forehead is ashen indeed, but those ashes are in the form of the cross.

It is there that the Promised Savior did His salvific work. It is there, on the cross, where the death demanded for sin was rendered. It is there, the cross, that God the Son made that tree of death into a tree of life for you. For there, on the tree, did He render His life, His perfect life, His sinless life, for your sins, and for the sins of all men.

The death Adam earned Christ died. The death you have deserved Christ died. He died bearing your sins. He who came down from heaven was returned to the ground, but not to the dust, for His soul was not left in Sheol, nor did the Holy One did not see corruption. By the Word was dust made flesh in the first man. And by the Word made Flesh was the sentence served, the price paid, and death overcome.

It is He, True Man, yes, and True God, who as we prayed today/tonight "desires not the death of a sinner, but rather that he turn from his wickedness and live." This day/night and every day/night He invites you to do just that: turn from wickedness and live.

And that life, the life He invites you to live, He has won for you by His precious suffering, His perfect death, and His glorious resurrection. It is He that has mercy upon all, and abhors nothing He has made. He looks past the sins of men that they may repent. He spares all because we are His, and He is the lover of souls.

Through His Prophet He invites you to "return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness, and He relents from doing harm." And through His Apostle He promises "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

For if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the Blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. So while the ashes you wear remind you of the due penalty for sin, the penalty paid for by Christ on the cross, so too does the Blood He shed bring you the forgiveness and life He won.

And that Blood He makes you drink this night, the Blood of Christ, the Blood that cleanses you from all sin, the Blood that places you into fellowship with one another, the Blood that places you into fellowship with God. Here, at this altar, here, in this secret place, your Father who sees in secret rewards you openly. So come, take and eat, take and drink, and partake of heavenly treasure, for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

1 John 1:5-9

*Quadragesima*, Ash Wednesday, 2020 A. ✠ D.

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