

Remember

Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.

Symbols are powerful, are they not? Words are as well. Ash Wednesday brings the two together for followers of Jesus perhaps like no other.

There are those words that echo the words the Lord God spoke to Adam regarding death—"returning to the ground." This was the consequence of sin: "for dust you are, and to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:19).

And there is that powerful symbol, that shape that the ashes take when they are placed on our forehead (or, for some, on the back of their hand): it is the sign of the cross, the symbol that reminds us of how our Lord Jesus took upon Himself the curse of death as He went to the cross for us.

I have wondered before: How long of a sermon is appropriate for Ash Wednesday if the message is right there, a message that has been placed upon your forehead or upon your hand. And does that shape, the symbol of the cross, trump the words (dust=death) on Ash Wednesday?

There is much to remember on this day. To remember how our Lord took upon Himself this frail and fragile frame of dust (His incarnation). To remember how Jesus trudged through the dust of Judea, Galilee, and Samaria as He shared God's amazing grace with those laid low in the dust and ashes of their sin. To remember how the dust clung to Jesus' knees as He worshipped and prayed to His heavenly Father, for He shared fully in our humanity. To remember how Jesus' ultimate destination, the cross outside Jerusalem, would be the intersection of the curse of sin and the Conquest of the Savior.

And, of course, all this leads us to think of Christ's triumph over sin and death as He rose in victory on the third day. To remember that we have been joined with Jesus in His death and resurrection when we were washed clean in the waters of Holy Baptism. To remember that on that day we were marked with the sign of the cross and sealed with the Holy Spirit forever. To remember every day the implications for all of life because we are the precious, redeemed, blessed, children of God.

What will you remember from today?

Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return. And remember above all that the symbol of the cross points to the victory of our Savior, Jesus Christ, who has redeemed you so that you "may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity" (Small Catechism; Explanation of the Second Article of the Apostles' Creed).