

TODAY IS ASH WEDNESDAY

I was raised a Roman Catholic. The significance of Ash Wednesday brings to mind three memories:

1. We went to church to receive ashes on our forehead from the priest, "Remember man that you are dust and to dust shall you return". Depending on the time of day we went to church, there was the curiosity factor to see who of my friends, neighbors and community was a fellow "Christian", "The Sign of the Cross". In my small village in upstate New York (Finger Lakes Area), population of 1,000, it seemed everyone was a believer. For a teenager to consider anything about my own mortality was preposterous. I was more worried about the next basketball game.
2. Ash Wednesday is the first day of the Lenten season. We had to "fast" and "repent". My brothers and sisters usually gave up chocolate and candy, may be even Coke & Pepsi & RC Cola. We had fish on Friday, but that really wasn't a sacrifice because we all really liked fish. I remember the deep fried haddock dinners that Dad would bring home from Palmer's Fish Market.
3. Once my brothers and I became old enough to be altar boys, we also were immersed in the Friday evening rituals of the "Stations of the Cross". Again, it was something we did but I didn't pay too much attention to the meaning behind the story. I loved the music, the rituals, the smell of incense and candles in the air.

As I matured in my spiritual life (much later than you might imagine) I came to realize that this is a time for me to prepare myself for that moment when I meet our Lord and Savior face to face. It is a time for meditation, a time for prayer, a time for forgiveness for those who may have harmed you and for forgiving yourself, just as our Lord has forgiven us.

It is a time to turn outward and reach out to family, friends, and neighbors with a helping hand, a warm hug, a welcoming smile, a listening ear and a thankful heart.

I pray that during this time of Lent that our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, will lift you up and with the grace of the Holy Spirit, bring you to peace and the sure knowledge that you are loved. Amen.