

ASH WEDNESDAY – 2011

Lent is a special time of the Church year. We begin by asking God for the grace to change, to grow into a better person. How many of us find it easy to change? How many find it easy to diet, to stop smoking or drinking, to exercise or to pray? We all resist change. Joel says to us:

“There is still time. Return to me with all your heart, with fasts, tears and weeping.” (Joel 2:12)

Centuries of tradition shows that praying, fasting and alms-giving help us resist evil and gives us the discipline to change. Have you ever listened to the Serenity Prayer? “Lord, grant me the grace to accept the things I cannot change, to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.” When we dare to live what the sign of the cross on our foreheads means, we show the world that we know the difference and that we committed to change what we can change to bring us closer to God. But remember Matthew says:

“When you give alms...do not let your left hand know what the right is doing...When you pray, go to your room, close the door, and pray to the Father, who is there...When you fast, perfume your head.”

We must pray like Jesus, who had a deep relationship with the Father. We must fast like Isaiah, who in chapter 58 says, “care for the poor, the lost, and the oppressed.” And finally, give alms to our church and to the causes that serve the poor, for God hears the cries of the poor.

These are the age-old practices that make the sign of the cross not just a sign. It says we want to be more like Christ. It says we accept the way of the Cross. “Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return.” Our life is what we do between dust and dust. The ashes do not protect us from death. They are caused by death. They’re signs of our death to our self and a “yes” to God, to follow Christ’s example. It’s the 1 day that separates us from all other Christian traditions. Let us wear it proudly.