

Before the foundation of the world God knew you, and called you by name.

God knew each and every one of you before the world was created, and he loved you from the moment he knew you.

As the sun rises and sets, so we are born, and so we will one day die.

In past seasons of Lent we heard the words; “Remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” Today we will hear; “Turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel”.

Dust to dust, ashes to ashes.

You know, there’s is not much value in dust and ashes. Gardeners know that it can be used to help grow plants - but basically it is worthless.

You can't make it pretty by painting it, or smell good by spraying perfume on it.

Dust is dust, ashes are ashes - and the plain fact is they both are largely to be avoided.

But not today. Today is special.

The ashes we use today are the burned Palms of Palm Sunday a year ago.

These ashes call us to recognize our sins and to renew our commitment as followers of Christ.

Lent in itself has a rich history of being a time of renewal, of interior “spring cleaning,” of penance and fasting, of giving something up.

But giving something up for Lent should not be the only focus for us.

We go without some food so that we might know what someone else who is hungry all the time might feel like.

We take the money we would have spent on soft drinks, candy, pizza, video games, and donate it to some worthy cause.

All of this is a form of fasting from something and almsgiving—we refrain from some food, and we give to those who are less fortunate.

For us older folks, Lent is also a time to concentrate on our personal interior lives—the change of heart that is talked about in the first and second readings.

We are also called to look at those rough edges that may need to change:

Maybe it's our tone of voice? Or maybe we don't always tell the truth? Or perhaps we sometimes use bad language? Maybe we haven't been very nice to the kid who sits by us in class, or in the lunch room?

So why do we bother tonight smearing ashes on our foreheads? Why do we gather and remember what we are on this cold winter night?

The ashes that are placed on our foreheads remind us of the need to change our heart in some way during this time before Easter.

When we see the ashes, we are reminded that just as ash is dirty, so is sin. It reminds us that God loves us, and we need to turn toward God and try to live as best we can.

I'm going to close with an observation for those of us who are old enough to understand. It was written by an early Church father by the name of Basil.

“The bread which you do not use is the bread of the hungry.

The garment hanging in your wardrobe is the garment of the one who is naked.

The shoes that you do not wear are the shoes of the one who is barefoot.

The money you keep locked away is the money of the poor.

The acts of charity you do not perform are so many injustices you commit.”