

Blessing the Dust

Ash Wednesday

Slide: Blessing the Dust

A few weeks ago, I gave a final holy communion to a beloved sister in Christ, a child of God who was near the end of her earthly journey, and who, at age 96, was quite ready to enter into that new creation promised to her by God. As odd as it may seem that death is ever a welcome guest, this beautiful one was not afraid. She was prepared for that time that we all inevitably face, the return to ash, the carbon from which we came.

I sat with the family for a time after communion as this great-grandmother asked for a scoop of ice cream. Lovingly fed one teaspoon at a time by her granddaughter, it was clear that this ice cream was a delight to taste. She smiled, held the ice cream in her mouth, licked her lips, and asked for another bite. Knowing that it may have been her last taste of ice

cream, it was clear that this was a moment of joy, a simple pleasure to a child, but to her a holy connection. It was a time of mindful blessing. What an honor to have shared that.

Clearly, having lived life long enough, she saw death in a more friendly way than many of us who are left to muddle through. In our human life, we are generally not very capable of dealing with the uncertainty of life let alone our deaths. In fact, we generally avoid thinking about that inevitability. We even do a great deal to avoid admitting that people actually die – using phrases such as “she passed away” or “celebration of life”, as if by doing so, we remove the Debbie Downer of ours or our loved ones mortality.

And yet, perhaps my duty today is to remind you that there is more to this day than our brokenness, our sin, our shame, and our ultimate end of life. Yes, life is a risky business and no one gets out alive, but it is exactly because of that

fragility that we are able to cling to and grasp the value of what God has blessed us with each and every day.

Today, I consider another meaning of Ash Wednesday. As this beloved 96 year old member did as she ate a few spoonfuls of ice cream with delight, that brevity and uncertainty of life instead invites me to praise, wonder at the beauty, and to seize moments along the way because I am more keenly aware that it is transitory, that it is blessing if I take the time to see. Why would I do this? Because the psalmist tells us that this is the day the Lord has made, even though it be a temporary and transitory day; even though it is fleeting; it is also a moment of blessing in its fragility.

As a way of attempting to live more awake to the blessings each day as they come, especially in a world that is full of grief and pain as ours is, Chris Sims and I invite you to join us and our youth to the 40

days of Lent picture challenge, which if desired, you can get a handout on as you leave today.

Slide: #picturelent

Each day a holy word is given to ponder upon and to look for in your life or in the world. It needn't be complex at all. For those who would like to add to it a photo challenge, you can add your photo to the Facebook picture post I put up each day during Lent on the key word for each day. Today's word is "Blessing". Where do you see blessing even today on a day where we are reminded of the fragility of our mortal lives?

Where today is the blessing in your life? Not only are these ashes today marked with the reminder of death, these ashes imposed upon us are a claiming on what God can do within the dust and within the stuff of which the world is made – inside the smudge we do bear.

Slide: Video (Amen.)

