



Podcast for Ash Wednesday: 17<sup>th</sup> February 2021

Mgr Daniel McHugh

*Picture of a person with the Cross of Ashes and these words: Journey of Faith with Monsignor Daniel Life from the Holy Mass*

Hello, I am Monsignor Daniel McHugh. Today I will be reflecting on Ash Wednesday. Just the other day, I read this on Twitter: "This makes you think!" The author quoted St John Vianney, Curé d'Ars, who wrote "The fire of Purgatory is the same as the fire of Hell. The difference is, it is not everlasting." I have to say it stopped me for a moment! Ash Wednesday is a day where we are meant to stop and think with the imposition of the Ashes on our foreheads in the form of a Cross. This year with regulations in place about not touching in the Pandemic, Ashes will be sprinkled on our Heads; we are going to miss the Cross!

The Ashes used in this Rite all over the Catholic World are rich in meaning. You may remember, just the other week we read about the Old Testament Prophet, Jonah, being called by God to go to Nineveh to call the people to repent their sins. And they did so in Sackcloth and Ashes. By the way, you will be interested to know that one of the places Pope Francis will go to on his upcoming Apostolic Visit to Iraq is Nineveh.

The Old Testament practice of Sackcloth and Ashes as a sign of repentance of sin was carried over into New Testament times. And though we don't normally wear Sackcloth anymore we do have the Rite of Blessing of Ashes at the beginning of Lent, the season of Repentance.

The Priest says a longer version of this prayer over the Ashes, which come from Burning of the Palm Branches of the last Palm Sunday: "O God who desire not death of sinners, but their conversion...be pleased to bless these ashes which we intend to receive on our heads, that we who acknowledge we are but ashes and shall return to dust...may gain pardon for sins and newness of life..." As the Ashes are imposed these words are said: "Remember that you are dust and to dust you will return"; words that go back to the account of Creation in the Book of Genesis, where we read: "God fashioned man of dust from the soil". The final time those words will be spoken over us are at our burial. The other week I entombed the ashes of a Catholic man who had been cremated and these were some of the words I used: "we recall that our bodies bear the imprint of the first creation when we were fashioned from the dust; but in Faith we remember, too, that by the new creation we also bear the image of Jesus who was raised to glory". And I made the Sign of the Cross – the Cross that normally is placed on our foreheads, as a symbol of Christ's love dying on the Cross and raised to new life. Those present, cast soil onto the casket as the custom is at burial.

This year we can trace the Cross on our foreheads personally as we do at the reading of the Gospel for Sunday Mass.

**Monsignor Daniel McHugh**

Co-ordinator for Ethnic Chaplaincies in the Archdiocese

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So we begin the wonderful season of Lent marked by this communal act, but especially a time when we each personally examine and renew our commitment to the way of Jesus, turning away from sin.

Now the reading which is the second reading at the Mass for Ash Wednesday. It is taken from St Paul's second letter to the Corinthians... Paul writes...  
Here ends the reading

I conclude with the prayer over the offerings at the Mass for Ash Wednesday...

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**Monsignor Daniel McHugh**

Co-ordinator for Ethnic Chaplaincies in the Archdiocese