

## **"Ashes to Ashes, Dust to Dust"**

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"Almighty God, you have created us out of the dust of the earth: Grant that these ashes may be to us a sign of our mortality and penitence, that we may remember that it is only by your gracious gift that we are given everlasting life, through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen". Prayer over the Ashes: Liturgy for Ash Wednesday BCP page 265

Wednesday, February 18, is Ash Wednesday and the beginning of Lent. Of course, the primary liturgical and spiritual act for the day is having ashes smudged on your forehead as a reminder of your mortality and penitence. What I have always found curious is that the Liturgy of Ash Wednesday doesn't require the imposition of ashes--it is optional. Look on page 265 of your Book of Common Prayer and read the rubrics (the italicized directions) and you will note that the words are "If ashes are to be imposed." "If " means optional.

Can you imagine an Ash Wednesday without ashes smudged on your face? What would be the point?

Ash Wednesday is not about what we do with ashes, Ash Wednesday is about what God does with ashes and dust. Out of the dust of the earth, out of ashes, God creates life. The dust of the earth and God's creative and loving will connect all life. We are a community of common origin with the whole earth, and the life we have been given finds its purpose, its meaning, in God. And God's purpose for the dust of the earth we share as God's children is life--the gracious gift of everlasting life in Jesus Christ.

That's what God does with ashes and dust.

Ash Wednesday is about life--the life God has given to the whole earth--the life of ashes and dust. Our purpose on Ash Wednesday and the season of Lent is to remember and discern how we might live more fully and more consistently in the way of Jesus--the complete and perfect expression of God's will for the life of ashes and dust.

So maybe Ash Wednesday is about what we do with ashes and dust--the ashes and dust that has been given life in us, in our neighbor, and, indeed, the whole creation.

Happy Ash Wednesday.

