

In a few moments you will be invited to the observance of a Holy Lent.

You will be asked to take a close look at how you live your life;

To set aside time for prayer; To fast, to deny yourself extraordinary pleasures; to confess your sins and to ask for God's grace for self-reflection for the next 40 days. That reflection might help us to come to an understanding that our God is a loving God who is always ready to forgive us and give us a fresh start.

Today we are asked to enter into a time of drawing closer to God; of renewing, reawakening; refreshing our relationship with God and others.

This day is a day that we put aside all of the hype of looking good and pretending that we are in charge of life and death. Today is a day that we recognize that we are just another person with a smudge of dirt on our head."

Ashes are a symbol of our mortality. Ashes echo the story of creation where God lovingly created human beings from dust. God lovingly created new life from the dust of the earth. Dust that was just plain ordinary dirt until it was filled with the very breath of God.

We are of humble beginnings. Many people misunderstand the meaning of humility. A humble person is one who knows who he or she is, a person who knows that being mortal, being flawed and being totally dependent on God is being true to oneself.

Lent is a special time that the church gives us to focus on our relationship with God. There are many ways to do this and I'm sure that all of us have our own way of being with our God, but maybe during this 40 days of preparing for resurrection, we could try mixing it up a little, put a little something extra into our time with God.

Fasting and penitence is one way of clearing our minds and hearts of the consumerist, self-centered world around us. But fasting or giving something up, can't be an end unto itself. If we are fasting or abstaining from something let's try doing something positive in its place.

We could volunteer time, engage in some spiritual reading or just take time to sit and be with our God, to listen for that still quiet or sometimes thunderous voice to give us reassurance or direction.

Humility is about looking at what is true and real. Humility is about being grounded in the truth of who we are: finite, flawed,

dependent on God, and completely, utterly, totally loved by God, nonetheless.

As we begin our Lenten journey, we accept ashes as a sign of penitence and mortality and the truth of who we are.

We are invited to spend this Lent learning to trust that God is gracious and kind and forgiving and merciful, and that what humans think of us isn't as important as our relationship with God and what we do for others because we are loved by God.

We are invited to take on a discipline of doing some action solely for the purpose of pleasing God, or giving something up in order to make room in our lives for God's Spirit to come in and move around it us.

So as we come forward to receive ashes on our foreheads, let us remember that the dust that we came from and the dust we return to is a very special dust that is created by a loving God who is daily breathing His very life breath into us and creating us anew.

Amen