

# Dear Brothers and Sisters



Ash Wednesday, and the beginning of Lent, is this week!

Wednesday February 26<sup>th</sup>, From 5:15am onwards, ashes will be distributed at the GSP Bus stop in Montvale, the WCL Train Station and WCL Bus Stops. Last year, I asked one of our parishioners who was at the Train Station if he would like to receive ashes, he replied “No thank you, it’s too early.” “Too early?” I asked, “You don’t want to receive ashes?” “Oh, I thought you said Hershey’s” he replied.

As a child growing up, the ashes were a like badge of honor! Everyone wanted to be seen with the ashes on their forehead. Not so today. Last year more than one person politely declined the opportunity to be marked with ashes, and not because they weren’t Catholic or Christian. Who wants to be seen commuting into NYC with a black mark on their forehead? What would the people in the office think?

On the other hand, ashes were never meant to be a badge of honor, to be paraded in front of others like some sort of trophy. Ash Wednesday is meant to denote a hidden reality, namely that we carry ashes within: ‘Remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return.’

The ashes used to mark our foreheads are made from last year’s burnt palm branches. The ash signifies that we are made from dust, and to dust we shall return. Lent does us the great service of putting us in touch with our mortality.

Why pretend that life is just getting on a train or a bus every morning, going to work, to pay the bills, to pay for college, to pay for a vacation.....but for what? Is that all life is? For many people the answer, sadly, is yes.

Lent announces that our work, our house, our friends, our family, our vacation time, cannot be all that our life is, because they are all fleeting. They will all pass away. Most people recoil at the thought of this: “No, thanks, I don’t want ashes. I’m good!”

However, Lent is not meant to be morbid or pessimistic. Its purpose is not meant to be a downer. On the contrary, the Church calls this “The joyful Season of Lent!” Lent can also be joyful for us, if we accept to be confronted with our mortality, because this is the only way for us to truly experience heaven, Life in Christ.

Heaven is not merely a hope for the hereafter. Lent tells us that the Resurrection, Eternal Life, begins now: on the train, on the bus, in our work, with our friends, in our family, in our homes, on our vacations, can all be an experience of Heaven today.

An excellent way to experience this joyful Season of Lent, is to participate in our Lenten video series, Genesis to Jesus, Thursdays at 8:00 to 9:15pm in the classroom. We will make a spiritual journey to learn how to read and understand the Bible from a Catholic Perspective. I sincerely hope to see you there.

Fr. Sean