

ASH WEDNESDAY 2017

Turn around!

Oh, go on! Turn around and take a look! There now! That wasn't so hard, was it? Or was it? That is why we are all here today!

Turn around! *Repent* is the word in Greek, as in: *Turn away from sin, and be faithful to the gospel!*

You did have fish today, didn't you? At the very least, a cheese pizza! Today is the day we tell God and everybody – we're Catholic! Like flying the flag, sporting our ashes tells all the world who we are: Roman Catholic and proud of it!

We Catholics are a different sort. Our worship makes us acutely aware of the importance of visible signs – the pouring of water, the eating of food, the anointing with oil – all witness to spiritual happenings – external signs imparting internal grace.

We Catholics have always rooted our religion in God's good earth, consciously incorporating all the senses in praise of God and service to neighbor. We Catholics alone nail a naked and tortured body to a Cross. We founded the first universities, hospitals and Mardis Gras.

Any wonder, we Catholics crawl out of the woodwork today --- not to the sublime or the intellectual, but to the simple and humble gesture of bearing dirt on our bodies – God's good earth from which we came and will return.

Today, we are marked for Christ's sake! By the sign of His cross!

In moments, I will bless those ashes but not you. You are not blessed by today's action. You are imposed upon, challenged and incorporated into the serious character of Lent's penances: Prayer, Fasting and Almsgiving.

**Lifting up our hearts, denying our appetites, emptying our pockets –
To better resemble the lean and kindly Christ who took on our flesh –
To make us better than we are.**

So, turn around!

In Lent 2017 be bold and turn around!