Fr Matthew Charlesworth, SJ
https://sj.mcharlesworth.fr/

Ash Wednesday

Date: Wednesday, March 5, 2025 | **Season:** Lent | **Year:** C
First Reading: Joel 2:12-18
Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 51:3-4, 5-6, 12-13, 14+17 | **Response:** Psalm 51:3a
Second Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:20-6
Gospel Acclamation: Psalm 95:8
Gospel Reading: Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18
Preached at: the Chapel of the Most Holy Name, Kolvenbach House **in the** Archdiocese of Lusaka, Zambia**.**

Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.

It is a sobering thought, isn't it? We move through our days with plans and ambitions, with desires and expectations, and yet here we stand at the threshold of Lent, confronted with the stark reality of our mortality. The ashes on our foreheads are not mere symbols—they are declarations. They declare that we are fleeting, that we are broken, and that we are utterly dependent on the mercy of God. But they also declare something else: that in this dust, God is at work. That in this brokenness, grace is already stirring. That in this fleeting life, eternity is whispering our name.

The prophet Joel cries out: "Return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning. Rend your hearts and not your garments." This is no ordinary call to repentance. This is not a mere reminder to say a few extra prayers or give up chocolate for forty days. No, this is a summons to transformation. The prophet does not ask for hollow gestures. He asks for a heart torn open—open to the presence of God, open to the possibility of change, open to the radical work of grace.

And why? Because the God to whom we return is "gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and rich in kindness." We do not turn back to a God eager to condemn, but to a God eager to restore. The ashes we receive today are not the mark of our demise; they are the soil from which new life will grow.

Saint Paul pleads with the Corinthians, and with us: "We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." This is not a casual suggestion—it is a cry from the heart. Be reconciled. Step away from the noise, the distractions, the count-

CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 · https://sj.mcharlesworth.fr/homilies/2025-03mar-05-yc-lt-aw/

less little things that pull you away from the One who calls you by name. Take stock of your life. Ask yourself: what in me needs healing? What in me needs to be surrendered? What in me have I kept from God's hands for far too long?

And then, we come to the words of Jesus. "When you give alms, when you pray, when you fast… do not perform these deeds so that others may see them." Lent is not about appearances. It is about authenticity. It is about stepping into the quiet places of the soul and allowing God to do what only He can do. It is about fasting from what is empty so that we might be filled with what is eternal. It is about giving, not because we must, but because love demands nothing less. It is about prayer—not as a task to be completed, but as a lifeline, a connection to the One who has loved us from the dust of our beginning to the dust of our end.

So, here we stand. The ashes on our foreheads tell the truth: we are dust. But they also tell a greater truth: we are God's dust. And in His hands, even dust has a future.

As we set out on this Lenten journey, let us not waste this moment. Let us embrace the call to return, to be reconciled, to surrender ourselves into the hands of a God who will never tire of making beauty from ashes.

As you leave this place today, and while we keep Pope Francis in our prayers, I ask you:

- What is God asking you to let go of so that He may give you something greater?
- Where is He calling you to return, to be reconciled, to trust Him more completely?
- And when the dust of this world settles, will you be found clinging to what fades, or standing firm in what endures?

The journey begins now. Step forward. Be reconciled. Be transformed.

Source: https://sj.mcharlesworth.fr/homilies/2025-03mar-05-yc-lt-aw/

This homily is shared for personal and pastoral use. Please attribute the author and do not alter the meaning when quoting. If you wish this homily to be translated - there is an option on the website which will allow you to translate it into the language of your choice.

Licenced under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) license.

The author does not speak for the Society of Jesus or for the Catholic Church.

Receive Fr Matthew Charlesworth's Homilies on
WhatsApp

Receive Fr Matthew Charlesworth's Homilies on
Telegram

Receive Fr Matthew Charlesworth's Homilies on
Signal

Scan for Website on
Clearnet

Scan for Onion Mirror
via TOR

In preparing this homily, I consulted various resources to deepen my understanding of today's readings, including using Magisterium AI for assistance. The final content remains the responsibility of the author.

CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 · https://sj.mcharlesworth.fr/homilies/2025-03mar-05-yc-lt-aw/