

### Week Beginning 3rd March – Ash Wednesday Gold in the Dust

Next Wednesday we will again be given a sober appraisal of the context of our existence. The context is dust. And there are no exceptions. Much as we try to fudge it, to wriggle away from it, even to deny it, Jesus, too, was alarmingly human – and remains that way in heaven to this very day. And his wounds still bleed.

There is no escape from the human condition. Yet that is the condition which God cannot resist. It is the very condition in which God chose to be revealed! We get to heaven, then, not by avoiding or denying the dust around and within us, but by completely entering into that darkened state. It is in our dust that we are saved. 'The Word became dust.' This is another way of saying, our scriptural scholars assure us, that 'The Word became flesh.'

This is the key which unlocks impossible doors. It is the 'hinge,' as Tertullian puts it, 'on which salvation turns.' Since the Incarnation, dust and flesh designate not only the hinge and pivot of a movement into nothingness and death, but also the hinge and pivot of a movement that passes through dust and death into the eternity of God . . .

On Wednesday the priest will trace a cross of ashes on us and tell us again that we are dust. If we only knew, these are best words we will ever hear. They remind us, because we are sisters and brothers of the incarnate Lord who became dust for us, that in our nothingness, too, we are filled with eternity, in our futility we are redeemed, and in our sin-strewn lives we are showered with hidden graces of true glory.

To say this is easy. To suffer it is hard. Rahner is so accurate in describing the boredom of everyday routine, the disappointments that we experience in everything – in ourselves, in our neighbours, in the church. We lose heart, he said, 'in the anxiety of our days, in the futility of our work, in the brutal harshness of our splintered world.' Again and again we shall lie in the dust of our failures, humiliated and wanting to cry.

And yet, and yet, on each Ash Wednesday, our church faithfully reminds us that we are walking sacraments of Christian paradox. Outwardly we carry the grey cross of nothingness on our foreheads: inwardly our hearts believe that everything is already ours. Outwardly we weep and bleed as we stumble up the grimy Calvary of our lives; inwardly our dust is already shining with Easter gold.  
(Unmasking God, pp 21,22,23)