Published on *The World Community for Christian Meditation* (http://www.wccm.org)

Ash Wednesday

Today you may see people on the bus or subway or waiting by the photocopier with a dirty mark on their forehead. Like seeing someone meditate in an airport terminal or waiting room you recognize them as fellow travelers on a spiritual journey, not mere strangers passing in the night. It is not a secret sign or an exclusive club but few they are who understand it.

We receive the ashes as a reminder not to waste time. “Remember you are dust and unto dust you will return. Repent and believe the good news”.

Odd as it seems these words spoken as the ashes are given bring comfort and hope because they remind us of an easily forgotten truth, one that our culture of easy denial finds uncomfortable to hear. We gorge on images of death and violence as entertainment but the real thing we brush away as morbid. Spiritual traditions teach that the mindfulness of death enhances the vivid contrasts of life and our capacity to live it to the full. The dust on the forehead is a reminder that the only way to live really is to live in the present moment. No fleeting moment of time, past and future, is lost or wasted when we undergo it in the present.

As Lent begins today this is the opportunity – to recommit and renew ourselves as spiritual beings on a human journey. If you didn’t get the ashes make the sign of the cross on your forehead yourself, or ask a friend to, repeating the words that are designed to awaken us. If you meditate renew your commitment to morning and evening times of silence and stillness. If you started and stopped start again. If you haven’t started yet, don’t waste time.

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Lent Daily Reflections 2011

Source URL: http://www.wccm.org/content/ash-wednesday