



February 26th

THE NEW SHOFAR

We play in the dirt from which Adam was created, to which he returned; the dirt in which Jesus was laid in death, from which he rose; the dust which will be our own resting place.

Who is Jesus and why do we call God “Father”?

We are now in the season of *grace* we call “Lent”. Why season of “grace”? Because these Church seasons are all about opportunities given to us through the Holy Spirit. God has not stopped drawing us to himself and the divine work of redemption did not end with the Ascension. It is all there for us, but because of our human frailties, we struggle between faithfulness and making our own way forward in life, and presumably to life eternal. Lent is God’s reminder that it does not work out like that anywhere else apart from in our fantasies.

Our first reading from Genesis is combined with the Gospel narrative about the testing of Jesus in the wilderness. These bracket our identities as humans. What does that mean? We can begin answering this by outlining who we are **not**. We are **not** dust. We are **not** in the image of God. We are **not** God-breathed creatures. We are **not** fallen and we are **not** redeemed.

How can I say that given what we know from the Scriptures? Because those things are only part of our story. Well then, who are we? The season of Lent is the time when God helps us to find the answer to that question. His answer. Not ours. I guess something like this...

We are dust indeed but “Glory dust”

I cannot remember where I first heard this phrase, but it has stuck with me for a long time. I value it because it brings together the two fundamental elements of our existence: glory + dust, with these two elements united in a most spectacular way in Jesus of Nazareth, God, Son and Saviour. We are not one without the other. Join all of the elements in my list of “nots” above and then, and only then can we say we know who and what Adam truly is.

It would take a lifetime of Lents for us to come anywhere near to appreciating the greatness of this gift: God became a man, and embraced this world and through the incarnation, restored it to holiness once again, renewing its holiness through his life, death, resurrection and ascension. That holiness includes us while at the same time being a holiness we can access in ourselves and in others.

The incarnation means that the ordinary is lifted up. Remember that we are dust and to dust we shall all return. But we also need to remember that we in our dust have been lifted up to glory. And because of the goodness of creation, and its goodness restored in the resurrection, it is *already* lifted up. We are already ascended with Christ. And yet in some way, this ordinary glory (that is now lifted up to the Lord) drives us further up and further in, it still drives us to chase a glory we will never fully realize or comprehend.

Therefore, remember the God who became dust for us and remember the miniscule size of dust, its worthlessness. That is our Saviour... *(he who)...emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, ⁸ he humbled himself*

and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross (Philippians 2). He is the “Glory dust” in whose holiness we all share and destined to live forever. There is something standing between us and this inheritance God offers us: sin. How can we win?

...for many live as enemies of the cross of Christ (Philippians 3:18)

It is here today's Gospel comes into play. Jesus was **tempted** by Satan, events that **tested** his faithfulness to the mission his Father had given him. It is a real temptation by Satan one the Father allowed to take place because it was to be an indication to the world of his worthiness, a test of the kind God gave to Abraham. – do you trust me? Will you serve me and me alone? If there was no chance of Jesus failing this temptation, then it offers nothing to us. The dust side of Jesus of Nazareth could always compromise that saving mission. If not, he was not truly, fully, human. He had a choice. In the end he won on account of his faithfulness and obedient submission of his will to that of God's. The Glory was always in control of his dustiness. That is where this narrative offers hope to all of us.

What stands between us and eternal glory are what Paul refers to as *the enemies of the cross of Christ*. It is not easy to resist them. It is difficult overcoming them and so our only real option is to live **as Christ** in their midst, thriving under the umbrella of God's loving mercy and resisting all that is not of God.

As human beings we are a mishmash of contradictory realities

Genesis 3 is the story referred to as ‘the fall’, a fall from what was meant to be, expressed more generally in Rom 3:23 as a human condition: *all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*. There is a whole cluster of symbols around this central expression of being fallen: humanity is corrupt (Gen 6:11-13; Jer 17:9); stained or blemished (Ps 51:2,7), lost or strayed (Ps 119:176; Isa 53:6), burdened or heavy-laden (Matt 11:28), hard-hearted (Ezek 3:7; Mark 3:5), captive or servile (Rom 7:23; Gal 5:1), dead (Eph 2:1,5; Col 2:13), and blind (Luke 4:18; John 9:40-1). All these imply a deficient or distorted identity and resultant behaviour compared with what was originally given. We are less than what we could or should be. Which is why God his son and the Spirit offers us the season of Lent.

So then, who are we? Who is the true me? That is why God has given us Lent!

This is the season we follow the lead of the Holy Spirit speaking to us in our daily readings, our Bible studies, liturgies (Sunday Mass and Stations of the Cross), our Lenten observances, prayers and, of course, our daily Eucharistic celebrations.

At the opening of his public ministry, Jesus made a declarative statement through his defeat of Satan. He chose to go the way of the Father, to obey God's will rather than seek a compromise and pursue salvation along an alternative. God's glory shone through his dust, the divine image and likeness through the fog of deceit and lies. It was not easy and it took forty days of fasting and deprivation to come out as victory and that is his witness to us.

It is the same Satan at work in the world today, using the same deceitful lies. He is defeated but still dangerous and the only way to find victory is to define ourselves by the glory of God by following God's will. Our faith lives must grow, must be transformed and our lives in our faith community reflect those grace-led transformations. Let us make sure we do not waste this season. Whatever of our previous Lenten successes, may this year we grow further and further in Christ, denying self and celebrating our dusty glory.