

## **Meditation for Ash Wednesday 2010**

### **Ashes and water**

**By Ann Fontaine**

As I was looking at resources for Ash Wednesday I came upon a website and saw in bold letters: WARNING - ashes and water do not mix - will cause burning!! And so it does. It makes a mixture that will burn skin. But the image captured my imagination and I thought it is even truer than the physical effects of mixing ash and water. Water and ashes are two of our most powerful symbols.

Water, used for Baptism is where we are first marked with the sign of the cross representing birth, new life, renewal, and liberation from slavery. Ashes are used on Ash Wednesday when we are once again marked with the sign of the cross, which now represents our mortality, death, endings, and enslavement.

Burning symbolizes the power of the Spirit coming alive in our lives. It is the awareness of our finite time on this earth. The power of the resurrection lights the fire of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Ashes bring home the reality of death -- we are mortal, we will die. As we say in the imposition of ashes - "Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return." But that is not the end of the story. Easter tells us that there is not just death and endings. Easter comes to tell us that we are also to "remember that we are love and to love we will return."

Lent is a journey from Ash Wednesday. We recognize our finite time here on earth, journeying to Easter and coming back to the awareness of the fullness of life as granted in our creation in the image of God.

The Ash Wednesday Gospel is odd for the imposition of Ashes. We hear that we should not practice our piety in public but perhaps we take this so seriously that we become afraid of practicing any piety before others.

The prophet, Joel, however, calls us to:

Sanctify a fast,  
call a solemn assembly,  
gather the people,  
sanctify the congregation,  
assemble the aged,  
gather the children,  
even infants at the breast and why --  
so people will not ask  
“where is their God?”

Let us show forth the holiness of our creator, with our ashes, so people will know that we are a holy people - committed to God and followers of Jesus Christ. How might we do this? I suggest we move beyond chocolate to declare our own fast and feast ---

Fast from judgment, Feast on compassion  
Fast from greed, Feast on sharing  
Fast from scarcity, Feast on abundance  
Fast from fear, Feast on peace  
Fast from lies, Feast on truth  
Fast from gossip, Feast on praise  
Fast from anxiety, Feast on patience  
Fast from evil, Feast on kindness  
Fast from apathy, Feast on engagement  
Fast from discontent, Feast on gratitude  
Fast from noise, Feast on silence  
Fast from discouragement, Feast on hope  
Fast from hatred, Feast on love

What will be your fast? What will be your feast?

*From The Episcopal Café Web Site*

*The Rev. Ann Fontaine, Diocese of Wyoming, keeps what the tide brings in. She is the author of **Streams of Mercy: a meditative commentary on the Bible.***