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AS IN ADAM ALL DIE

The ceremony that gives the first day of Lent its traditional name, Ash Wednesday, speaks directly to the heart of the gospel. Ashes are imposed on the foreheads of the faithful by the priest, who says, "Remember O man, that dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" – a form of words derived from God's judgment on Adam's disobedience, Genesis 3:19. With those words we acknowledge our solidarity with sinful Adam, and the death both physical and spiritual that is the wages justly paid for our disobedience to God, the source of all life. Yet, precisely in humbly acknowledging the justice of God's judgment against us, we appeal for his mercy to save and deliver us from ourselves: "Turn thou us, O good Lord, and so shall we be turned". This dust can only live again if God himself revive us by his Spirit and reform us by his Word. And so our repentance is a plea for spiritual resurrection. "As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:22).

The proper counterpart to Ash Wednesday's imposition of ashes comes very near the end of our Lenten penance, in the liturgy of Good Friday. We hear in faith the Passion of our Lord, we unite ourselves by Intercession with his love and charity, and then we bow or kneel in veneration before the cross. In the cross we find once more our sin, the betrayal of the Lord's charity, set forth in the Reproaches: "O my people, what have I done unto thee, or wherein have I wearied thee? Testify against me". We can only respond in penitence with the Trisagion: "Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy and Immortal, have mercy upon us". But then the cross is unveiled, its glory is revealed, and our penitence turns to praise of what his love and obedience have accomplished on the cross: "We adore thy cross, O Lord, and we praise and glorify thy holy resurrection; for, lo, by the cross, joy hath come to the whole world". With this praise is mingled the prayer of Psalm 67: "God be merciful unto us, and bless us, and show us the light of thy countenance, and be merciful unto us; that thy ways may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations".

If on Ash Wednesday we acknowledge ourselves the heirs of Adam's disobedience at the Tree, then on Good Friday we acknowledge ourselves the beneficiaries of Christ's obedience at the Tree of the cross. "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous...where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Romans 5:19, 20). The

movement from Adam to Christ, from sin to righteousness, from death to life: that is the transformation at the heart of Lent.

The Rev'd Gavin G. Dunbar

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