

**Homily – Ash Wednesday  
Mass at UTSA – February 14, 2024**

The imposition of ashes is a very eloquent invitation for us to remember that we are passing through. We are pilgrims, and we do not do everything well on our journey. That is why today the Church invites us to recognize that we are limited, and that sometimes our condition of imperfection prevails too much.

People your age often think they only need to see the doctor when they are sick. However, at my age you know that a regular visit prevents against the accumulation of issues, which would later be too hard to correct. Likewise, it is very healthy for our soul to be examined well on a regular basis. We tend to accumulate attitudes, habits. When examined, we may realize that some of those do not correspond to a good Christian life. Lent is the opportunity for us to do that annual general check-up, and to make those changes in habits, allowing us to continue our pilgrimage in full health.

The imposition of ashes is an invitation to conversion. “Repent, and believe the Gospel.” “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” We begin Lent with this symbol of our condition as sinful people, who open ourselves before God and before our sisters and brothers, confessing our guilt. In this way, we also express our desire for conversion, for a change of mentality. We do it with the hope of being able to die to sin, and be risen with Christ at Easter. It is a public manifestation of individual conversion.

On this Lenten journey, Jesus invites us to use three tools, which will help us move forward: prayer, almsgiving, and fasting.

Prayer helps us focus our attention on God. It begins in listening to his Word. It continues in the development of a personal relationship with God. It ends with making a greater place for God in our lives. No one can meet Jesus and then pretend nothing happened. That is why the Lord insists to us: “Do not be afraid.” Jesus assures us that we will not be disappointed.

Almsgiving helps us focus our attention on others. It invites us to turn to those who lack what I can give them. More important than giving money to the poor is giving affection to those who need it, in our families, in society, or in the outskirts of society. Gestures such as forgiveness, welcoming, solidarity, and other works of mercy, are the most necessary forms of alms. As Jesus explains to us, it is not about giving what we have left over, but about giving ourselves to others, getting involved in their lives. Pope Francis reminds us: “In Lent, we find new criteria of justice and a community with which we can press forward on a road not yet taken.”

Fasting helps us focus our attention on improving ourselves. It leads us to renounce excess, and to live holy indifference towards creatures. It becomes more natural when the presence of the creator is acknowledged. By coming into contact with the treasure, fasting helps us abandon secondary values, to put our hearts in God more fully. In this way, we can learn to use everything around us for the greater glory of God. The path to Easter must be traveled light, carrying only what is necessary.

Our Lady of Guadalupe, help us to get rid of everything that prevents us from travelling light to the encounter of your Son Jesus.