

**Homily – Ash Wednesday Mass  
St. Anthony Catholic Student Center, UTSA – February 22, 2023**

We begin Lent today with the sign of the imposition of ashes. It is a very tangible invitation for us to **become aware of our condition** as pilgrims. We are passing through this life. On our pilgrimage, we do not do everything well because we are limited humans, and – sometimes – our humanity prevails excessively.

It is always good for us to take a look at the underworld of the heart. Without realizing it – and with the rush of life – we collect junk, which – in the best scenario – is useless. Sometimes this junk takes the form of attitudes, postures, gestures, which are not quite evangelical. Lent may be the occasion, the right time, to do this **clean-up**, which allows us to continue our pilgrimage lightly packed.

The symbolic gesture of this day is the imposition of ashes, which points to conversion: “Repent, and believe in the Gospel.” The ash symbolizes our condition as sinful people, who open ourselves before God and before our brothers and sisters, confessing our faults. We also express our desire for conversion, for a change of mentality, with the hope of being able to **die to sin and then rise again with Christ on Easter**. Ash is the symbol that accompanies the people of God as a public manifestation of individual conversion.

The direction of Lenten conversion, following Jesus in today’s Gospel, is threefold: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

**Prayer** helps us focus on God. It begins by listening to his Word. It develops into a personal and familial relationship with God. It leads us to make more room for Him in our daily lives and in our important decisions.

**Fasting** helps us focus on improving ourselves. It helps us fight excess, fight our own consumerism, and achieve moderation. After our encounter with Christ – who may be represented by a precious pearl or treasure – fasting invites us to abandon anything that may separate our hearts from him. It is about sacrificing what is passing for what is eternal. As we make our way to Easter, we need to carry the minimum weight, just what is necessary. It is about subordinating what we considered necessary before we received the invitation from Jesus to enter his Kingdom.

**Almsgiving** helps us focus on others, especially those who lack the blessings we have received. It can certainly be done financially, by helping the poor. However, it can be practiced with equal or even greater urgency for the benefit those around us at school, at work or in our families. This means practicing forgiveness, acceptance, sharing, true solidarity and charity. It is about giving, but above all it is about **giving ourselves** to others, getting involved in their lives.

This threefold focus on God, ourselves, and others, helps us respond to Pope Francis' invitation to become part of a **revolution of tenderness**, which begun with the Lord's Incarnation in Mary's womb. He proposes two ideas: *"the beauty of feeling that one is loved by God, and the beauty of feeling loved in the name of God."*

Our Lady of Guadalupe, as you help us feel your tender embrace, help us to embrace Jesus and our neighbors with your own tenderness.