

a sermon from EZEKIEL 9:4:

LESSONS FROM ASH WEDNESDAY

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I. A PRAYER

Merciful GOD, You called us forth from the dust of the earth; You claimed us for CHRIST in the waters of baptism. Look upon us as we enter these Forty Days bearing the mark of ashes, and bless our journey through the desert of Lent to the font of rebirth. May our fasting be hunger for justice; our alms, a making of peace; our prayer, the chant of humble and grateful hearts. All that we do and pray is in The Name of JESUS, for in His Cross You proclaim Your love for ever and ever!"¹ AMEN.

II. A PROPOSITION

O Lord JESUS CHRIST, may we enter on This Ash Wednesday into these 40 days of Lent by dying to sin – with prayer, fasting and almsgiving; with works of charity, penance and devotion – that we may be renewed in newness of life unto righteousness when we enter into our Easter joy in Thee!

III. A SCRIPTURE - EZEKIEL 9:4 - PLACE A MARK ON THEIR FOREHEADS

⁴ And the LORD said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof.²

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֵלָיו עֲבֹר בְּתוֹךְ הָעִיר בְּתוֹךְ יְרוּשָׁלַם
וְהַתּוֹיֵת תּוֹ עַל־מִצְחֹת הָאֲנָשִׁים הַנֹּאנְחִים וְהַנֹּאנְקִים עַל
כָּל־הַתּוֹעֵבוֹת הַנֵּעֲשׂוֹת בְּתוֹכָהּ:³

IV. INTRODUCTION

The mark of ashes on this Day of Ashes - in the form of the blessed Cross made upon our foreheads – mark our lives and souls as belonging to our Saviour JESUS CHRIST. Now you may well wonder why we would begin a sermon on The New Testament celebration of Ash Wednesday with an Old Testament Scripture passage from the prophet Ezekiel. There is a connection between the prophet Ezekiel's vision in The Book of EZEKIEL which we have cited and the vision of the Apostle John in The Book

¹ 1, Catholic Family Prayer Book, Ash Wednesday, a prayer for Ash Wednesday, p 122-123.

² 2, KJV, EZEKIEL 9:4.

³ 3, BHS, EZEKIEL 9:4.

of REVELATION, which symbolize the sealing of Christians as the servant redeemed in The Lord. Such is the deep meaning of Ash Wednesday, calling us the faithful of GOD to a time of contemplation and repentance in preparation for the celebration of Easter.

V. WHAT IS ASH WEDNESDAY?

On Ash Wednesday - the first day of Lent and 40 days before Easter's Good Friday - we are called to reflect more closely the meaning of this cherished Christian tradition. Indeed, The LORD Himself calls us - the faithful of The Church on earth - to repent from our sins.⁴ This is the call of The Church to all faithful Christians to enter into this "penitential season" in preparation of celebrating the greatest joy of our Faith, which is Easter.⁵

Recall that the righteous Patriarch Job, when he was confronted by the holiness and omnipotence of The Creator face to face, and thereby was made to see his own unholiness and human frailty, he confessed before The Presence of The Almighty in humble humility his human sinfulness and mortality. So Job declares in n JOB 42:3-6, O LORD, "...therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not... I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth Thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes!"⁶ So we are reminded that, as that Old Testament saint Job repented of his sins before GOD in dust and ashes, so we also are called to repent of our sins before He Who lifts us up with His loving hands unto eternal life!

On Ash Wednesday, we remember "that we are [in body] but dust and ashes, yet by GOD's Grace we have died in baptism [in CHRIST's death] and have put on The Lord JESUS CHRIST" in new life in His resurrection.⁷ We begin these 40 Days of Lent on this day to "prayer, fasting and almsgiving... [and] to perform works of charity, penance

⁴ 4, Thurston, "Ash Wednesday."

⁵ 1, Catholic Family Prayer Book, Lent, p 121.

⁶ 2, KJV, JOB 42:3-6.

⁷ 1, Catholic Family Prayer Book, Ash Wednesday, p 121.

and other devotional practices, such as The Stations of The Cross.”⁸ Why these 40 days and these acts of devotion before The blessed Cross? So that may enter into Easter with a renewed dedication and thankfulness for our salvation in The Lamb of GOD!⁹

Let us consider together these 5 important lessons of our Christian Faith from Ash Wednesday: 1. our human mortality and sinfulness; 2. our need for repentance at The Cross; 3. a reminder of our being sealed in CHRIST unto salvation; 4. that we are baptized into newness of life in CHRIST’s resurrection; 5. our eternal salvation in The Lord.^{10 11} But first, let us consider briefly the connection between the visions of the prophet Ezekiel and the Apostle John of the mark upon the foreheads of the saints of GOD.

VI. THE EZEKIEL-JOHN CONNECTION

In REVELATION 7:2-3, Saint John is shown a vision of the final Divine judgement of men: “And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of The living GOD: and he cried with a loud voice... Saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our GOD in their foreheads.”¹² And again in REVELATION 9:3-4, “And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth: and unto them was given power... And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of GOD in their foreheads.”¹³ And again in REVELATION 14:1, “And I looked, and, lo, A Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with Him an hundred forty and four thousand, having His Father's Name written in their foreheads.”¹⁴

In a vision given to the prophet Ezekiel, he saw The Glory of GOD coming up to The Temple in Jerusalem, which had become corrupted with abomination and apostasy,

⁸ 1, Catholic Family Prayer Book, Lent, p 121.

⁹ 1, Catholic Family Prayer Book, Ash Wednesday, p 121-122.

¹⁰ 4, Thurston, “Ash Wednesday.”

¹¹ 5, Akin, “Ash Wednesday.”

¹² 2, KJV, REVELATION 7:2-3.

¹³ 2, KJV, REVELATION 9:3-4.

¹⁴ 2, KJV, REVELATION 14:1.

that The LORD might bring judgement. Ezekiel beheld in this vision in EZEKIEL 9:3-4 The LORD commanding one of His angels to “Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof.”¹⁵ This, that the upright and righteous men might be spared.

To appreciate what The early Church Fathers saw in the connection between the prophet Ezekiel and the Apostle John in their visions of marks of GOD upon the foreheads of His saints, we must consider briefly EZEKIEL 9:4 in The Hebrew Text:

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה¹⁶ אֵלָיו עֲבֹר בְּתוֹךְ הָעִיר בְּתוֹךְ יְרוּשָׁלַם
וְהַתִּייתָ תוֹ¹⁷ עַל־מִצְחֹת הָאֲנָשִׁים הַנֹּאנְחִים וְהַנֹּאֲקִים עַל
כָּל־הַתּוֹעֵבוֹת הַנֵּעֲשׂוֹת בְּתוֹכָהּ:¹⁸

VAYY'OMER [HASHEM]¹⁹ 'LO "AVIR BETOCH HA'IYR BETOCH
YERUSALAIM VEHITVIYTA TAV "AL-MITSCHOT HA'ANASHIYM
HANNE'ENACHIYM VEHANNE'NAQIYM "AL KAL-HATO"EVOT

HANNA"ASOT BECHOCHAT.²⁰ Or may I offer this literal rendition: “And He said The LORD to him, You pass over in the midst of the city, in the midst of Jerusalem, and you cause to make a mark a mark upon the foreheads of the men, the ones being made to sigh and the ones being made to mourn, over all the abominations being made in the midst of her!”

¹⁵ 2, KJV, EZEKIEL 9:3-4.

¹⁶ It is the practice of faithful Jewish people to not pronounce The Name of “The LORD” - יהוה - out of reverence for Him, but rather in reading The Sacred Scriptures in The Hebrew to substitute השם “HASHEM,” which means simply “The Name.”

¹⁷ 6, Whittaker's Revised BDB Hebrew Lexicon, B10796 - TAV תו - noun common masculine singular absolute: mark on forehead, sign of exemption from judgment... (pg 1063).

¹⁸ 3, BHS, EZEKIEL 9:4.

¹⁹ It is the practice of faithful Jewish people to not pronounce The Name of “The LORD” - יהוה - out of reverence for Him, but rather in reading The Sacred Scriptures in The Hebrew to substitute השם “HASHEM,” which means simply “The Name.”

²⁰ In my transliteration I will represent the letter א aleph = ‘ and the letter ע ayin = “

It is the Hebrew word here for mark – TAV תָּו – which draws our attention, meaning “a mark on the forehead [as] a sign of exemption from judgement,” most particularly exemption from the consequences of Divine judgement over the souls of men.²¹ TAV תָּו is a letter in the Hebrew alphabet, “...and in ancient script it looked like the Greek letter X chi, which happens to be two crossed lines (like an "X") and which happens to be the first letter in the word "CHRIST" in Greek...”²² Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ - Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ²³ - meaning “JESUS The Anointed One; JESUS The Messianic King; The Messiah JESUS - HAMMASHIYACH YESHUA” - תָּו הַמָּשִׁיחַ יֵשׁוּעַ²⁴”²⁵

We today picture The Cross as shaped like the small English letter “t,” but many Christians in times past were martyred on crosses shaped like the English letter “X.” So here is another of those seemingly impossible, subtle, ironic and profound “designs of coincidence” engineered by the hand of Providence which holds a remarkable testimony of the continuity between The Old and New Testaments! This connection between “TAV תָּו” and “X chi” “...is undoubtedly the mark REVELATION has in mind when the servants of GOD are sealed in it!”²⁶

VII. OUR HUMAN MORTALITY AND SINFULNESS

First, the ashes placed upon our foreheads in the form of the blessed Cross of our Lord JESUS CHRIST symbolize our human mortality and sinfulness, which should make us to cry out for deliverance and mercy to The Throne of Grace Above. Ashes in Scripture are often symbolic of and used by GOD’s people during times of penance and mourning. In such times in The Bible, “...the custom was to fast, wear sackcloth, sit in

²¹ 6, Whittaker’s Revised BDB Hebrew Lexicon, B10796 - TAV תָּו - noun common masculine singular absolute: mark on forehead, sign of exemption from judgment... (pg 1063).

²² 5, Akin, “Ash Wednesday,” Q: Why do they have their foreheads marked with a Cross?

²³ 7, GNT, MATTHEW 1:1.

²⁴ 8, HNT, MATTHEW 1:1.

²⁵ 9, Strong’s Hebrew Lexicon, [DANIEL 9:26], 4899 Messiah מָשִׁיחַ MASHIYACH: 1) anointed, anointed one 1a) of the Messiah, Messianic prince 1b) of the king of Israel 1c) of the high priest of Israel 1d) of Cyrus 1e) of the patriarchs as anointed kings.

²⁶ 5, Akin, “Ash Wednesday,” Q: Why do they have their foreheads marked with a Cross?

dust and ashes, and put dust and ashes on one's head. ...the customs of fasting and putting ashes on one's forehead as a sign of mourning and penance have survived to this day” as part of Lent.²⁷

The English Churchman Ælfric in about 990 AD says of this Christian rite, “...in The Books both in The Old Law and in The New that the men who repented of their sins bestrewed themselves with ashes and clothed their bodies with sackcloth. Now let us do this little at the beginning of our Lent that we strew ashes upon our heads to signify that we ought to repent of our sins during the Lenten fast!”²⁸

In The Almighty’s creation work, He formed Adam’s body out of the dust of the earth, and animated to life his body by breathing His Spirit into him, as is recorded in GENESIS 2:7: “And The LORD GOD formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.”²⁹

So after The Fall of Adam and Eve, when The LORD pronounces His judgement upon our First Parents for their sin against His Commandment to not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in The Garden, He declares in GENESIS 3:19: “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.”³⁰ And when Abraham besought the mercy of The LORD for the sake of the righteous upon that sinful city of Sodom in GENESIS 18:27, he said in humility, “And Abraham answered and said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto The Lord, which am but dust and ashes.”³¹

Of our sinfulness, the prophet Isaiah confesses for all of us that we are full of iniquity and, The LORD being holy, laments that no man may come into The Almighty’s Presence and live apart from The Grace of GOD! So we read of Isaiah’s vision of The

²⁷ 5, Akin, “Ash Wednesday,” Q: Why is the signing done with ashes?

²⁸ 4, Thurston, Ash Wednesday,” paragraph 2. A quote of the Anglo-Saxon homilist Ælfric, from “Lives of Saints,” ed. Skeat, I, 262-266.

²⁹ 2, KJV, GENESIS 2:7.

³⁰ 2 KJV, GENESIS 3:19.

³¹ 2, KJV, GENESIS 18:27.

LORD in ISAIAH 6:3, where he heard an angelic voice cry out, "...Holy, holy, holy, is The LORD of Hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory!"³² It was then that Isaiah trembled, for he says in verse 5 as he stood before The Presence of The King of The Universe, "...Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen The King, The LORD of hosts!"³³

And but for The Grace of GOD, Isaiah knew that he would have perished, for he reports in ISAIAH 6:6-7, "Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged!"³⁴ But as the coals from the heavenly altar of GOD, by Divine Grace purged away the sins of the prophet, that he might stand in The Presence of The King of Glory.

So by Divine Grace are we now purged of our sins in CHRIST, that we might stand both now and forever in His Presence, as saint Paul declares in EPHESIANS 2:4-7, "But GOD, Who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with CHRIST, (by Grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in CHRIST JESUS: That in the ages to come He might shew the exceeding riches of His Grace in His kindness toward us through CHRIST JESUS!"³⁵

"Lord, Who throughout these forty days
For us didst fast and pray,
Teach us with Thee in mourning our sins,
And close by Thee to stay!"³⁶

³² 2, KJV, ISAIAH 6:3.

³³ 2, KJV ISAIAH 6:5.

³⁴ 2, KJV, ISAIAH 6:6-7.

³⁵ 2, KJV, EPHESIANS 2:4-7.

³⁶ 10, Moravian Church Hymnal, "Lord, Who Throughout These Forty Days" by Claudia F. Hernaman, hymn # 101, stanza 1.

VIII. OUR NEED FOR REPENTANCE AT THE CROSS

Second, the ashes placed upon our foreheads in the form of the blessed Cross of The Saviour symbolize our need for repentance. These ashes used by The Church come from the "...burning palm... [branches] which have been saved from the previous year's Palm Sunday, they are then blessed by a priest."³⁷ Even the saints of GOD in CHRIST still sin, committing even mortal sins that may endanger our very salvation, as well as the peace of The Church, our loved ones and of course of ourselves! But through The Church, "CHRIST instituted The Sacrament of Penance for all sinful members of his Church: above all for those who, since Baptism, have fallen into grave sin, and have thus lost their baptismal Grace and wounded ecclesial communion. It is to them that The Sacrament of Penance offers a new possibility to convert and to recover the Grace of justification."³⁸

In The Torah the Priests, after they had done the work of sacrificing a heifer according to The Law of Moses, the ashes of the burnt offering were collected and kept for future ritual repentance of and cleansing from sin. So it is recorded in NUMBERS 19:9, "And a man that is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer, and lay them up without the camp in a clean place, and it shall be kept for the congregation of the children of Israel for a water of separation: it is a purification for sin."³⁹ This was ordained in ancient Israel in recognition of the fact that the people of GOD do still stumble and fall into sin, which unless purged from life and soul, will separate the sinner from the congregation of GOD's people and from GOD Himself.

This should convict us in our hearts of having made it necessary for GOD The Father to Send His Son to suffer and die on The Cross to save us from sin and its terrible consequences, which is eternal separation from The LORD. Recall that on CHRIST's triumphant and joyful procession into Jerusalem, the people rejoiced! They laid their cloaks before Him. They sang out praises to The LORD that The Deliverer had at last

³⁷ 5, Akin, "Ash Wednesday," Q: Where do the ashes used on Ash Wednesday come from?

³⁸ 11, Catechism of The Catholic Church, The Sacrament of Forgiveness, # 1446, p 403.

³⁹ 2, KJV, NUMBERS 19:9.

come to, so they thought, free them from the oppression of the heathen Roman army of occupation. And they waved palm branches before Him.

So Saint Matthew records for us in MATTHEW 21:8-9, “And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way. And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to The Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in The Name of The Lord; Hosanna in the highest!”⁴⁰

The people here cried out the messianic PSALM 118:25-26, “Save now, I beseech Thee, O LORD... Blessed *be He* that cometh in The Name of The LORD...!”⁴¹ “Hosanna” is “a Hebrew expression meaning ‘Save now!’”⁴² as in The Hebrew Text of PSALM 118:25: ⁴³ הוֹשִׁיעָה יְהוָה אֲנָּה – ‘ANNA’ [HASHEM]⁴⁴ HOSHIY”AH!⁴⁵ Literally, “Ah now, I beseech You, O LORD, You cause to save and deliver!” But as the people celebrated, they did not know that within so short a time that their shouts of joy would be turned into tears of mourning! The people looked for the hand of GOD in The Person of The Saviour to restore their earthly theocratic kingdom, national Israel.

They could not see that The Kingdom of GOD in Heaven was upon them on earth, and that HAMMASHIYACH YESHUA”⁴⁶ - ⁴⁷הַמָּשִׁיחַ יֵשׁוּעַ – The Messiah JESUS would soon give up His life for the saving of their eternal souls! As our Lord says in JOHN 10:10-11, “...I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. I am The Good Shepherd: The Good Shepherd giveth His life for the

⁴⁰ 2, KJV, MATTHEW 21:8-9.

⁴¹ 2, KJV, PSALM 118:25-26.

⁴² 12, Wycliffe Bible Commentary, MATTHEW 21:9, p 965.

⁴³ 3, BHS, PSALM 118:25a.

⁴⁴ It is the practice of faithful Jewish people to not pronounce The Name of “The LORD” - יהוָה - out of reverence for Him, but rather in reading The Sacred Scriptures in The Hebrew to substitute הַשֵּׁם “HASHEM,” which means simply “The Name.”

⁴⁵ In my transliteration I will represent the letter אַ aleph = ‘ and the letter ע ayin = “

⁴⁶ In my transliteration I will represent the letter אַ aleph = ‘ and the letter ע ayin = “

⁴⁷ 8, HNT, MATTHEW 1:1.

sheep!”⁴⁸ So when we receive the ashes of palms used from previous Palm Sundays upon our foreheads, we should both “...rejoice of JESUS’ Coming... [and also mourn] that our sins made it necessary for Him to die for us in order to save us from hell!”⁴⁹ But such is GOD’s love and His Grace unto us!

“As Thou with Satan didst contend,
And didst the victory win,
O give us strength in Thee to fight,
In Thee to conquer sin!”⁵⁰

IX. A REMINDER OF OUR BEING SEALED IN CHRIST UNTO SALVATION

Third, the ashes placed upon our foreheads in the form of the blessed Cross symbolize our being sealed in CHRIST The Messiah, that our lives and souls be spared before the coming judgement of GOD over the souls of men. In The Bible, “...a mark on the forehead is a symbol of a person's ownership. By having... [our] foreheads marked with the sign of a Cross, this symbolizes that... [we] belong to JESUS CHRIST,” Who suffered and died at The Cross, that we might be forgiven our sins and receive in Him eternal life.⁵¹ As Saint Clement of Rome says, “Let us fix our eyes on CHRIST’s Blood and understand how precious it is to his Father, for, poured out for our salvation, it has brought to the whole world the Grace of repentance” of The Cross!⁵²

Recall how The LORD instructed the Israelites through Moses to place the blood of the slain Passover lamb on the doorposts of their homes in Egypt, that when The Angel of The LORD passed through the midst of the land, He would pass over those whose homes were so marked. So The Almighty commands the Israelites in EXODUS 12:12-13, “ For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute

⁴⁸ 2, KJV, JOHN 10:10-11.

⁴⁹ 5, Akin, “Ash Wednesday, Q: Why are ashes from the previous year’s Palm Sunday used?

⁵⁰ 10, Moravian Church Hymnal, “Lord, Who Throughout These Forty Days” by Claudia F. Hernaman, hymn # 101, stanza 2.

⁵¹ 5, Akin, “Ash Wednesday,” Q: Why do they have their foreheads marked with a Cross?

⁵² 11, Catechism of The Catholic Church, IV. Interior Penance, # 1432, p 400. Quote of Saint Clement of Rome on the need of inner conversion of the heart for the saving of the soul in CHRIST.

judgment: I am The LORD. And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt.”⁵³

Even so, when The LORD looks upon the souls of those who He has redeemed from sin and death in The Lamb of GOD – JESUS CHRIST – The Father does not see our unrighteousness, but the righteousness of The Son. For The saving Blood of The Saviour shed for us is, as it were, painted upon the doorposts of our souls, that The LORD’s judgement shall pass over us and that we shall live in His Presence, both now and forever! As John The Baptist confessed when our Lord came to him to be baptized in JOHN 1:29 “...Behold the Lamb of GOD, Which taketh away the sin of the world!”⁵⁴

“As Thou didst hunger bear and thirst,
So teach us, gracious Lord,
To die to self and chiefly live
By Thy most holy Word!”⁵⁵

X. BAPTIZED INTO NEWNESS OF LIFE IN CHRIST’S RESURRECTION

Fourth, the ashes placed upon our foreheads in the form of the blessed Cross of The Son of GOD symbolize our newness of life in Him, for He alone is The Saviour of His people! That newness of life comes to the newly converted and is restored to the penitent who have been reconciled back to The Church by first an inner conversion of the soul, which brings forth earnest words and works of renewal. As Wycliffe says, Christian good works of faith are “the ethical outworking of true piety” as we become more like CHRIST through the trials of life.⁵⁶

So The Council of Trent declares, “JESUS’ call to conversion and penance, like that of the prophets before Him, does not aim first at outward works, “sackcloth and ashes,” fasting and mortification, but at the conversion of the heart, interior conversion.

⁵³ 2, KJV, EXODUS 12:12-13.

⁵⁴ 2, KJV, JOHN 1:29.

⁵⁵ 10, Moravian Church Hymnal, “Lord, Who Throughout These Forty Days” by Claudia F. Hernaman, hymn # 101, stanza 3.

⁵⁶ 12, Wycliffe Bible Commentary, JAMES 2:14, p 1434.

Without this, such penances remain sterile and false; however, interior conversion urges expression in visible signs, gestures and works of penance!”⁵⁷ Such newness of life in CHRIST is marked by a true and living faith that brings forth the good works which GOD has called us to. So Saint James reminds us in JAMES 2:17, “ Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.”⁵⁸ For as a man’s life lives in the union of body and soul, so our newness of life in CHRIST lives in the union of faith and good works!⁵⁹

The prophet Isaiah understood that newness of life is found only in GOD, and that no work apart from or contrary to The LORD is either good or profitable. So he says in ISAIAH 45:16-17, “They shall be ashamed, and also confounded, all of them: they shall go to confusion together that are makers of idols. But Israel shall be saved in The LORD with an everlasting salvation: ye shall not be ashamed nor confounded world without end!”⁶⁰ There is no salvation or renewal of life unto true righteousness in men apart from have a true and living faith, producing the good fruits thereof, within covenant with The Almighty! And once, by GOD’s Grace, we enter into His covenantal community, He calls us to ever live close to The LORD. For then “we shall not be ashamed nor confounded,” and our good works will show forth the newness of life in us!

So the ashes upon our foreheads on Ash Wednesday should remind that we are called to newness of life in CHRIST, and convict us to put aside the works of the world, the flesh and the devil! Saint Paul reminds us in ROMANS 6:3-6, “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into JESUS CHRIST were baptized into His death? Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death: that like as CHRIST was raised up from the dead by the glory of The Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin!”⁶¹

⁵⁷ 11, Catechism of The Catholic Church, IV. Interior Penance, # 1430, p 399.

⁵⁸ 2, KJV, JAMES 2:17.

⁵⁹ 12, Wycliffe Bible Commentary, JAMES 2:26, p 1435.

⁶⁰ 2, KJV, ISAIAH 45:17a.

⁶¹ 2, KJV, ROMANS 6:3-6.

So Saint Chrysostom observes that "...Here then he says there are two mortifyings, and two deaths, and that one is done by CHRIST in Baptism, and the other it is our duty to effect by earnestness afterwards. For that our former sins were buried, came of His gift. But the remaining dead to sin after baptism must be the work of our own earnestness, however much we find GOD here also giving us large help. For this is not the only thing Baptism has the power to do, to obliterate our former transgressions; for it also secures against subsequent ones. As then in the case of the former, thy contribution was faith that they might be obliterated, so also in those subsequent to this, show thou forth the change in thine aims, that thou mayest not defile thyself again. ... 'for if we have been planted together in the likeness of His Death, we shall be also in the likeness of His Resurrection!'"⁶²

"And through these days of penitence,
And through Thy Passion-tide,
Yea, evermore, in life and death,
JESUS, with us abide!"⁶³

XI. OUR ETERNAL SALVATION IN THE LORD

Fifth, the ashes placed upon our foreheads in the form of the blessed Cross of GOD Incarnate symbolize our eternal salvation. Our sin and unrighteous had, before we were redeemed by The precious Body and Blood of our Saviour, made us enemies of GOD and separated from His blessings in this life and His very Presence in the next. But thanks be to our loving King of The Universe, by His Grace, we may rejoice as in faith even that we are under His providential hand even now and shall dwell with Him forever in Heaven!

Job confessed this in faith, even from the midst of his afflictions, in JOB 19:25-27, "For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see

⁶² 13, "Homily XI on Rom. vi. 5." Saint John Chrysostom. NPNF1-11. Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistle to the Romans.
<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf111.vii.xiii.html>

⁶³ 10, Moravian Church Hymnal, "Lord, Who Throughout These Forty Days" by Claudia F. Hernaman, hymn # 101, stanza 4.

GOD: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me!”⁶⁴ We see how “Job is confident that, although all earthly kin may disown him..., his Divine Kinsman is prepared to own him and to speak in his favor the last word in the case...” For Job’s hope in The Redeemer Above now becomes unshakable, that “GOD will thoroughly fulfill His Kinsman’s office, even delivering Job from the tyranny of the king of terrors,” which is death!⁶⁵

As Wycliffe observes, “Here are the beginnings of what progressive Revelation would ultimately enunciate in the doctrines of The Coming of CHRIST at the end times, the resurrection of the dead, and final judgement.”⁶⁶ When Job’s search for comfort from fallen man and things of this world came to naught, he looked instead up to Heaven and, in his faith, such were the things revealed to him by the arm of The LORD! As Job repented in ashes before GOD for his sins, so also do we. Job had faith in The Redeemer – in The Incarnation of CHRIST, His death and resurrection, His Second Coming and in eternal life through Him – as do we. The ashes upon our foreheads call us back to These Divine Truths of salvation at The Cross!

And though we had been convicted under The Law of GOD and worthy of death, yet CHRIST has taken upon Himself our sins and imputed to us His righteousness! And by His victory over sin, death and the grave, as we are baptized into He Who is our Eternal Good Shepherd, so shall we also live with Him forever Above! What great things has CHRIST given us His saints? Saint Chrysostom lists but a few: “...first the being freed from wickedness, and such evils as the very recollection of puts one to shame; second, the being made a servant unto righteousness; a third, the enjoying of holiness; a fourth, the obtaining of life, and life too not for a season, but everlasting!”⁶⁷

⁶⁴ 2, KJV, JOB 19:25-27.

⁶⁵ 12, Wycliffe Bible Commentary, JOB 19:23-29, p 476, paragraph 2.

⁶⁶ 12, Wycliffe Bible Commentary, JOB 19:23-29, p 476, paragraph 2.

⁶⁷ 13, “Homily XII., Rom. VI, ver. 21.” Saint John Chrysostom. NPNF1-11. Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistle to the Romans.

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf111.vii.xiv.html>

So Saint Paul says in ROMANS 6:21-23, “For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness. What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death. But now being made free from sin, and become servants to GOD, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of GOD is eternal life through JESUS CHRIST our Lord!”⁶⁸

“Abide with us, that so, this life
Of suffering overpast,
An Easter of unending joy
We may attain at last!”⁶⁹

XII. IN CONCLUSION

So the ashes placed upon the foreheads of the Faithful on Ash Wednesday are to be valued for many blessed reasons: First, we are reminded of our human mortality as we stand before GOD The Creator of all things. Second, we are reminded of our need for repentance as sinful mortal men before The holy and righteous LORD. Third, we are reminded that, as Christians, we are sealed in CHRIST JESUS. Fourth, we are reminded that in our Lord JESUS CHRIST we are granted newness of life in this world. Fifth, we are reminded that, most importantly of all, in our Saviour JESUS CHRIST, we receive the promise of our eternal salvation.

When then we come before GOD’s Priest this Ash Wednesday, and he places upon our foreheads the blessed ashes in the sign of The Cross and says, “Remember man that thou art dust and unto dust thou shalt return,” let us be grateful for what our Lord has given us!⁷⁰ Let us therefore receive the mark of holy ashes from The Church on Ash Wednesday with humble, thankful, reverent and joyful souls for the many wondrous blessings that GOD Almighty bestows upon us at The Cross of our Lord JESUS CHRIST! Let then every day that our Maker in Heaven gives us life be a celebration of Ash Wednesday!

⁶⁸ 2, KJV, ROMANS 6:21-23.

⁶⁹ 10, Moravian Church Hymnal, “Lord, Who Throughout These Forty Days” by Claudia F. Hernaman, hymn # 101, stanza 5.

⁷⁰ 4, Thurston, “Ash Wednesday,” paragraph 1.

Let us with the prophet Ezekiel saw the angel of GOD in EZEKIEL 9:4 “...set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done” in this fallen world.⁷¹ But let us also rejoice with Saint John as he saw the angel of GOD in REVELATION 7:2-3 having “...sealed the servants of our GOD in their foreheads.”⁷² And let us be thankful that we are, with these ashes, sealed now in this life within The Church on earth, as we shall soon forever be sealed in the next within The Church in Heaven!

O Lord JESUS CHRIST, may we enter on This Ash Wednesday into these 40 days of Lent by dying to sin – with prayer, fasting and almsgiving; with works of charity, penance and devotion – that we may be renewed in newness of life unto righteousness when we enter into our Easter joy in Thee! In The Name of The Father, and of The Son, and of The Holy Spirit, AMEN!

⁷¹ 2, KJV, EZEKIEL 9:4.

⁷² 2, KJV, REVELATION 7:2-3.

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