

Homily for Ash Wednesday, February 18, 2026.



Each of us will live these 40 days of Lent in the unique way that God has called us to. As long as we are drawn closer to God and each other by the end of it then one person's journey during Lent will be just as valid and just as good as

another person's journey. If we hear and respond to the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth, then we can be sure the Kingdom of God is that much closer to its fulfilment. Having said this, here are a couple of insights I draw from the readings that I'm going to try and live in my life.

The opening line of the first reading is the impetus for us this Lent. It's the Prophet Joel saying, ***"Even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart."*** Even now? What's going on "now" in Joel's world that so vitally important? Joel was a prophet living about 600 years before the birth of Jesus. "Now" was crunch time for the Jewish people of Judah. Their country was about to be invaded and taken over by the Babylonians. And to make things worse, they were in the middle of an infestation of locusts that was destroying their crops.

If you have ever felt overwhelmed at the struggles of your own life or the state the world is, then you know how Joel must have felt. God was saying to Joel and the

Jews, “It might be the 11th hour, the enemy is at the border, and there’s no food to eat because of the plague of locusts but come to me anyway.”

“Even now” means it’s never too late to turn to God. It’s not important that you’re late to the party; all God is concerned with is that you respond to the invitation. God is saying, “Stop everything that you are doing and come to the feast I’m preparing for you. Assemble the aged, gather the children, even infants at the breast. You priests who are in the vestibule, stop what you’re doing and come to me. Grooms and brides, moments before you exchange wedding vows, just stop and come to me. Come not rending your clothing but rip open your hearts. Your hearts are the only thing I ever wanted in the first place. I know you wanted to offer me a grain offering at the Temple but you cannot because the locusts destroyed all the grain, that’s O.K. I don’t want your grain; I want you. I’m going to the highways and byways searching for you. Come whether you feel worthy or not. Come whether you have a grain offering or not. Come whether you’re in a state of grace or disgrace. Just come as you are. I want the authentic you, the you that gives alms freely and the you that sometimes is self-serving; the you that prays and the you that sometimes can’t find the words to pray; the you that fasts at times and the you that sometimes is a glutton.”

A second insight I draw from the readings that might help us over these 40 days. See Lent not as a one-way ticket but as a return ticket. It’s a return to the place from where you first started. Although you will be marked with ashes using the words, “Repent and believe in the Gospel,” another phrase we could use is, “Remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” That one seems harsh.

Knowing what we now know about the cosmos, we could say, “Remember you are stardust, and to stardust you shall return.”

Where you came from is where you will return. You came from the earth and you will return to the earth. On a chemical level, all the atoms of your body are the very atoms that make up the earth and the universe. It still sounds reductionistic, a collapse into nothingness. We can only handle this truth, that our origin and our destiny is dust, if we place it in a greater truth. This truth, that we are dust and will return to dust, comes to us on the first day of Lent. The greater truth comes on the last day of Lent, Holy Thursday.

On Holy Thursday we will hear that Jesus, just prior to washing his disciples’ feet, has a tremendous God-consciousness. The Scriptures tell us that, ***“Jesus, knowing that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from table and began to wash his disciples’ feet.”*** His origin wasn’t dust but that he had come from God. His ultimate destiny wasn’t that he was returning to dust but going to God. His origin and destiny were the same—not dust—but God. So, why bother with ashes at all? They remind us that it’s through dying to our imperial ego, by going down into death, that the True Self emerges. It’s only by going through death, and not avoiding it, that we truly experience the life that only God can give us. Lent leads us to the Cross not as a dead end (pardon the expression) but as a way to where God is ultimate leading us—to the resurrection. True, we came from dust and will return to dust. But truer still, we came from God and will return to God.

Perhaps we can live Lent not as a deprivation, as a giving up of something, like as if in God's family scarcity is some kind of a value. We are experiencing scarcity in so many ways already. There's a scarcity of affordable homes, of clean drinking water, of hospital beds and nursing homes, of affordable groceries, of meaningful jobs, of social assistance, and the list goes on. Lent is preparing us for a life where there is more (resurrection), not where there is less (death). I'm not saying don't give something up for Lent. Don't give up something you love, only to return to it 40 days later. Give up something that's a burden, something that's dragging you down, something you don't need, something that's killing you, something that's preventing you from getting to the resurrection and becoming all that God intended you to be. Give up shame, fear, self-loathing, or the idea that you're not enough. Let all that dissolve into the Love that's taking you into Itself.

Make Lent a time to experience the immensity of God's love for you. Lent is a time to rend our hearts and make them ready for the new life God wants to give us at Easter. The stain of the ashes will finally be washed away in the waters of baptism. Scarcity will give way to abundant life.

~Fr. Phil