

Ash Wednesday (February 22, 2012)

*“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit:
a broken and a contrite heart, O God,
thou wilt not despise.”*

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

We can give God our time, we can give God our talent, we can give God our money. But as St. Paul says to the Corinthians: *“And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.”* It is at the core of these acts that we wish to get: to dig deep down to the heart of it all. Those acts that we do are not good acts unless they spring out of a charitable heart, that kind of love that is self-emptying and other-centred. It is not the thing that we do that has merit *in the doing*, it is *who we are in the doing* that adds quality

and value to it all. Otherwise, all that we do are merely dust and ashes, and today we are especially reminded of this. We are nothing but dust and ashes, and it takes God’s redeeming grace to transform who we are and shape us into Love, and so we wear our ashes in the shape of Christ’s Cross, by which we are transformed.

God desires sacrifice, and He welcomes it with open arms when that sacrifice is *“a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart.”* That word “contrite” means “to break into pieces, to reduce into splinters.” “A contrite heart” means “a crushed heart”: in the same sense that bones are crushed under the weight of pressure, so is the heart to be crushed under the weight of our sin. This is the sacrifice God desires: that we be broken down, convicted of the truth of our wavering and

our failing and our utter need for Him, humbled to the core so that we dare not lift up earth-bound eyes to heaven. The purpose of our Lenten physical fast is to make felt in our bodies, and measurable in our lives, the inward fast of our souls. In our spiritual fast we shut off the toxic valves that lead inward, and we turn on the tap of God's Goodness to flow in. As we sing in that familiar hymn, we are inviting ourselves to be broken so that we may be mended: "Spirit of the living God, / fall afresh on me. / Break me, melt me, mould me, fill me."

We, with Jesus, are entering our desert to be confronted with our demons. We will examine ourselves by the light of Love, and armed with such a Lamp of Truth we will venture into the dark recesses of our souls. We will see those secret and hidden things

which cause us to feel, think, and act in darkness, those things which blindly form our personalities and dictate how we interact with our world. With the hammer of Justice and Truth we will break down those protective walls which enclose and suffocate our hearts. We will then, with hearts exposed, get to the core of our being, and when those false things have fallen away, after being broken and melted, we will be moulded and filled. And upon being filled, we will let that filling flow out to God and to the world. This is the Journey of Lent. This is the journey of our hearts. This is the journey of our God within us, and the journey of us within God. May God grant us a holy fast, a joyful feast, and peace at the last.

Now to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, be ascribed all honour, power, glory, might, majesty and dominion, both now and for evermore.

Father A. E. Nussey