

**Homily Ash Wednesday      Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> February, 2010.**

A young Jewish man wanted to study to become a rabbi. He decided to leave the USA, where he lived, and travel to Jerusalem to study with one of the most famous scholars and teachers there. When he arrived, in his eagerness, he went straight to where the rabbi who was to teach him lived. On reaching the rabbi's home and entering his study he was surprised, and a little disappointed, to see so few books, and to discover how plain and simple it all looked.

"Where are all your books?" he asked the older man.

"Where is all your luggage" asked the rabbi.

"Oh, but I'm only passing through," said the student.

"So am I," said the rabbi.

We're only passing through. *"Remember that you are dust, and to dust you will return."*  
This is what the Church asks us to do today – to remember our transitory nature.

For us this is a serious thought, but not a sad thought. It's serious because it's real. That's why the Church asks us to remember it. It's a happy thought, and not a sad one, because today we remember here we are only passing through, this is not home, somewhere else is – therefore it can only get better! Paul writes: *"The visible things last only for a time, the invisible things for ever. For here we know that when the tent we live in on earth is folded up, there is a house built for us, an everlasting home not made by human hands, in the heavens."* (2 Cor 4:18b-5:1) Here we are camping out, we are in our tents – they're good enough of course. Camping is great, I love camping, but it isn't home. For each one of us a house is being built, very different from this tent. That will be home. The ash reminds us of this. So today is a happy day. It's only sad for those who don't remember, not for those who do.

Today is a happy day for another reason - we are all in this together, all of us. Everyone can receive ashes because everyone can be reminded that they are only passing through, that they are mortal. Everyone can come for ash. You don't have to be Catholic, you don't have to be Christian. Buddhists, Muslims, Rastafarians, we're all passing through. You don't even have to be human. Your pet cat or dog can come for ash today! What's true for me is true for him too. He's only passing through, and God's love has a place for him. Francis knew this that's why he called everything brother or sister. You don't even have to be a mammal! Leaves and rocks, snakes, ants and worms can all come for ash today – they're all passing through. So today binds us all together as creatures. *"Remember that you are dust and to dust you will return."*

We go through the gates of death alone, but a place is being prepared for us, at home. Jesus invites us to trust in His promises, and not let our hearts be troubled. Lent is the time of purification, that's why we fast. It's also a joyful time so we rejoice. We are on our way home.