

ASH WEDNESDAY REFLECTION



TERESA,
AUSTRALIA



THU,
VIETNAM

It was not many years ago that every school and parish had an incinerator. At our school, one of the jobs of the class monitor was to take out the trash and set fire to it. It is uncomfortable to think now about how much soot we put into the atmosphere. Not to mention the fumes of burning plastic and other things. The word recycling was still a few years away; frankly, it's a pity it didn't enter our vocabulary a bit sooner.

One time, two members of our class decided to start throwing ash at each other. They made an unholy mess and ended up looking like wrecks. The teacher made them write out fifty times the line from today's Psalm: 'O wash me more and more from my guilt.' With benefit of hindsight, I can see that the Psalm has bigger things on its mind than ten-year-olds getting dirty in the incinerator. The focus of the Psalm is far more on God's mercy and kindness

than our silly behaviour. It asks for strength, a 'steadfast spirit.' It also asks for the gift of intimacy with God. 'Do not cast me away from your presence.'

Later, I discovered that at school the teachers used ashes from the incinerator to place on our foreheads on Ash Wednesday. I don't think this was the correct procedure and was, I think, a matter of convenience. Yet it does seem to make a point. When we receive the ashes, we are asked to remember that we are dust and will return to dust. The journey of Lent takes in hope from a place of humility to one of light. The things we throw away, the people we disregard, are the very place we can encounter God.

Project Compassion, organised by Caritas Australia, is a great way of embracing the journey of Lent. It asks us to remember that there are people

in the world who are often treated like rubbish. Metaphorically, they live among the ashes. Our decisions can make a huge impact on helping them journey with hope into light. The rituals of Ash Wednesday have a special meaning for all of us. They call us to recognise the humanity we share with others and to return with our hearts to the God of justice. Like Mary, we are called to be a blessing for all generations to come.



PRAYER OF INTERCESSION



We pray for all who are trying to rise from the ashes in their lives. May our support for Project Compassion remind us that now is the time to turn to the Lord with all our hearts and embrace the needs of God's whole family.

"GOD'S LOVE CALLS US TO MOVE BEYOND FEAR. WE ASK GOD FOR THE COURAGE TO PUT ON FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE AS WE GO OUT INTO THE WORLD AND BECOME THE WORD IN BODY AS WELL AS SPIRIT."

POPE FRANCIS