



School girl in Samoa holds school work as she looks to camera.

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## Ash Wednesday March 5

**There is a great story about G K Chesterton, the famous writer who died in 1936. Among many things, he was the creator of Fr Brown, the detective who uses powers of empathy to understand people better than the police. He was once asked to contribute an essay to a collection on the theme of 'What is Wrong with the World?' His response to the question required only two words. 'I am,' he wrote.**

Ash Wednesday, which celebrates the start of Lent, calls us to a more courageous engagement with reality. That is why, when we receive ashes, we often hear the words 'remember you are dust and to dust you will return.' That is our truth. It is easy to look at the state of the world and descend into blame and indignation.

Sure, there are many things that are desperately troubling. Wars, poverty and environmental degradation are part of a long list. But who among us has the courage to own up and respond to the question, 'what's wrong with the world,' by answering 'I am.'

Don't misunderstand. We are mostly good people, doing our best to love and serve each other. But we would sell ourselves short if we left the future

of Earth to others who we thought were more to blame. Ash Wednesday asks us to look at the world and our part in it. Every year, we begin our journey to Easter with Jesus's advice to go into our private room, wherever that may be, and encounter the Lord one on one. Christianity, unlike so much else in the world, has little time for self-marketing.

Ash Wednesday is Day One of our Lenten journey. God's invitation to 'come back to me with all your heart' is also an invitation to leave our private room and step into a world in urgent need of our love and honesty. This year, Project Compassion is calling us to *Unite Against Poverty*. St Paul says, 'now is the favourable time.' We can make the most difference when we are most truly ourselves.



### PRAYER OF INTERCESSION

We pray this Lent for a deeper trust in God's plan. May our commitment to prayer, fasting and almsgiving, awaken within us a hunger for justice and compassion. May the Jubilee year remind us of our need for a fresh start. May our work for Project Compassion help us to *Unite Against Poverty*.