

Ash Wednesday Year A

“An aged man is but a paltry thing, a tattered coat upon a stick, unless soul
clap its hands and sing, and louder sing for every tatter in its mortal dress.”

W. B. Yeats

I have been too much acquainted with death this past year. First my fifty two year old first cousin died...then a very close friend....then that same fifty two year old first cousin's father, my uncle...my father's older brother....I'm reminded of Dante's remark to Virgil upon their entering the Inferno... “I had not thought death had undone so many.” A classic understatement to say the least...But of course death is the so-called undoing of all of us...some sooner than others...but all in all, we don't live long in the grand scheme of things.

This is the day in the church wherein we get real...the day in which we remind ourselves that we are going to die...ashes the outward and visible sign...and it is also a day in which the church makes an outrageous claim that death is not alien to the created order, but part of it and therefore sacred...and not to be feared....Artists know this: that our mortality gives contrast, resonance to the beauty of life, perhaps even begets it...that death...the ash and dust of existence has its own music, in a minor key, perhaps even dissonant at times, but always in keeping with the one song that though we are dust and though we are ash, we are also light...we are the light of love....love that is real, every bit as real as dust and ash... love luminous and warm, like light.

This is the very light of God that has and does and will transform our world, so that we are able when the time comes to sing of our own death... our own deserved rest from the hard work of bearing God's life to the world...a lifetime, a hard days work in God's commonweal about which we can only sing....remember you are ash, dear people of God....remember that you are dust...but remember also that you are light...a light born of the tatters of our mortality that will warm even the cold of death....remember.