

It makes one wonder: what is so special about getting dirt smudged on one's face and being told that one is going to die that seems to be such an irresistible draw? Could it just be because it's true!

In this "information age," we have become accustomed to receiving all sorts of information of which we have no real need and from which we derive no real benefit. So it may be increasingly hard for us even to imagine hearing something that really matters – let alone something that matters because it is true. In a world saturated with feel-good propaganda, partisan political ads, and outright lies, we're finally hearing something that is true. It has to be one of the great examples of the church's liturgical genius that it can take something so unattractive – but so true – as our inevitable return to dust, and ritualize it so popularly – and effectively – every Lent.

Lent is the church's annual wake-up call to get reconnected and renewed. That's what Lent is all about, because that's what our life on earth must ultimately all about. One Ash Wednesday, I overheard someone explaining Lent to his friend as "a time to get connected with ourselves." Well, Lent is most certainly a time to renew ourselves. But we do that by focusing not on ourselves, but on the big picture and where we hope to be in that picture – and on the only one who can get us from here to there. Lent is our annual opportunity to reconnect with Christ – Christ tempted in the desert and victorious on the cross, Christ descended among the dead and risen to new life, Christ living at the right hand of his Father and forever present among us in his church. Lent is our special time to allow him to make a real difference in our lives and to be transformed by that experience, because the kingdom of God really is at hand.