



I Take the Cross of Jesus Christ

Ashes. Remains of burnt embers and residual grey powder so fine it settles on any surface, soiling the air and dusting the ground. Long a sign of mourning and repentance, ash reminds us of the finitude of life. Dust. From dust, humankind was created; to dust our bodies will return upon death.

Many believers observe Ash Wednesday prior to the seasons of Lent and Easter. Pausing in the midst of the weekly routine, we recall the importance of repentance, our need for forgiveness, our desire for confession. A dusty, ashen cross is scrawled across our foreheads as a visible reminder of our neediness and sinfulness.

Ashes and dust have the tendency to cause messiness and dirtiness. After stoking a campfire or digging in a flowerbed, we hastily reach for a garden hose or seek a shower indoors. The minute particles cling to our clothing, our hair, our faces, making us want to get clean.

Just as ashes and dust are messy, chaotic and uncontrollable at times, so our lives are often filled with disorder, filth and wrongdoing. We need cleansing. Deep within our hearts and minds, we need the water of God's grace to pour over us and wash away the filth.

To gain this purity and cleansing, we repent. We ask forgiveness from God. We admit our wrongdoings, our selfish desires, our deviant tendencies, our faulty thoughts. We plead for mercy at the hand of a Loving Savior, that he would make us whole, clean. We consciously make the decision to turn in the opposite direction from our sinfulness.

Furthermore, Christ calls us to complete discipleship through humility and unconditional sacrifice: "Then [Jesus] called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me'" (Mark 8:34, NIV). On Ash Wednesday as we enter the Lenten period of denial, we attune our hearts to sacrifice. As we move closer to Holy Week and the suffering and death of Christ, we acknowledge that great love and unconditional surrender is required. Jesus gave all of himself for us; he asks us to give all of ourselves to him.

As worship leaders, we issue a call to our brothers and sisters in the faith: let us accept the ashen cross upon the canvas of our lives, openly acknowledging the price of our salvation and the debt of love we owe to our Savior for his unending grace and forgiveness.

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