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## *Ash Wednesday Came To Us This Year*

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*  
by the Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler,  
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"Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return." A great many people heard those words on Ash Wednesday. But a great many didn't. This article is for the people who didn't hear those words.

"Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return." They are the words the priest said to every person as she smudged foreheads with ashes on Ash Wednesday. But she knows, and I know, and all of us know, that not every faithful Christian actually showed up at church on Ash Wednesday. It was a typically complicated day. There was business. There were meetings to manage. There were children to tend to. Some of us never even realized it was Ash Wednesday.

But this year, those words might really mean something immediate to us. This year, Ash Wednesday came to many of us, even if we did not actually go to it. Because, this year, many of us are aware of uncertain times. Most measures of our economy continue to slide. Stock market indexes drop. Unemployment numbers climb. It's as if people and businesses and companies have stopped spending. It's as if something is sick. Maybe something is dying.

So, even if you are not an active church-goer, you have heard those words in the past six months. You have thought to yourself, "What happened? Maybe I am not all that I thought I was. Maybe there is something that could die in me. Maybe I am mortal."

If you have said those words, or even if you have only thought them, you have experienced something of what Ash Wednesday is meant to convey. You have remembered that we are dust, and to dust we shall return. Ash Wednesday came to us. We are mortal. No matter how strong we are at any given time, there comes a time when we weaken. There even comes a day when we succumb.

Sounds gloomy, doesn't it? But Ash Wednesday is not just about death and doom. Those who came to church on Ash Wednesday also heard the words of forgiveness and new life. In fact, they received communion as well as ashes. They felt ashes on their foreheads; minutes later, they tasted wine in their mouths.

If the mortality of Ash Wednesday came to you acutely this year, I urge you also to hear the forgiveness and hope of Ash Wednesday, too. Ash Wednesday is not complete if it ends with mortality and death. Lent is not complete if it stops with sin and penitence. Ash Wednesday, and Lent, are meant to point to something greater: the hope of new and abundant life.

Our world, your world and mine, needs that hope of new and abundant life. God promises that it will come. God does not promise that we will avoid pain and suffering; after all, Jesus himself walks through pain and suffering-and mortality. So, let the fullness of Ash Wednesday come to you this Lent. Let Jesus come to you right where you are. Let Jesus walk with you in your world this Lent. His presence will not prevent pain and death; but his presence will lead you through that gate, into new and abundant life.

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The Very Rev. Sam Candler

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