

# THE BULLETIN

“So the faith was planted: so it must be restored.”

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*February 2024*

## Let us make this a good Lent

Adapted from a sermon by The Most Rev. Clarence Kelly  
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The Catholic Church has always imposed a measure of self-denial and mortification on her children. This is something that the world cannot understand. The world cannot understand the spirit of self-denial and mortification because it is animated by the spirit of self-indulgence. The Church is concerned with getting us to heaven in the next life, but the world is concerned with making a heaven in this life. The world says eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you die and all comes to an end. The Church says fast, abstain, and be sober, for tomorrow you die and then comes the judgment. From time immemorial, the Church, mindful of her mission, imposed penances on her children. The Church understands the benefits of self-denial and discipline and the dangers of self-indulgence. Thus she imposes the duty of fasting and abstaining. Jesus Christ said: “He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world, keepeth it unto life eternal. Unless the grain of wheat falling into the ground die, itself remaineth alone, but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit.” (John 12:24-25)

The motive, therefore, in imposing penances is not bitterness and morbidity, but rather the good of the soul and life everlasting. On Ash Wednesday the priest puts blessed ashes on our forehead and reminds us of our frailty and mortality. He says: “Remember, man, that thou art dust, and unto dust thou shalt return.” To the natural man these are distasteful words. They speak of a grim reality. They remind us of the fact that the death of the body is the result of original sin, and the eternal death of the soul in the fires of hell is the result

of our actual sins. When you work at a job, at the end of the week you receive your wages, your pay. When you work at sin, you also receive wages. St. Paul tells us what the pay is for the work of sin. He says: “The wages of sin is death.” (Rom. 6:23) The ashes that we receive on our forehead each Ash Wednesday teach us in a tangible way about the fate of our bodies. They show us by way of example what our bodies will be one day. Each and every person alive today will one day be dead. We will be buried in the ground and our mortal flesh will disintegrate. By the time our flesh disintegrates, we will have been already long since judged.

St. Alphonsus tells us that the Particular Judgment occurs at the moment and place of our deaths. If we die at home, we are judged at home. If we die in a hospital, we are judged there. If we die in an automobile accident, we are judged at the scene. Before we are buried, our eternal destiny will have been already irrevocably determined. So when the Church says, “Remember man thou art dust, and unto dust thou shalt return,” she is warning us about death and judgment, heaven and hell. She admonishes us for our sakes, for she loves us and would see us happy in heaven for all eternity. One day our bodies will be like ashes. They will fall apart by the process of corruption and decay. They will utterly disintegrate. But our souls are immortal. We will never cease to be. Hundreds of millions of years from now, we will be alive and conscious. We will live for as long as God shall be God. This is not a fairy tale. This is the truth. This is a fact.