

We begin this Lent  
In darkness  
And quiet  
And ashes,  
almost as if we are celebrating all these things.

And we are.  
Happy Ash Wednesday!

Barbara Brown Taylor had it right  
when she wrote in her book, *Learning to Walk in the Dark*:

**“I have learned things in the dark  
that I could never have learned in the light,  
things that have saved my life over and over again,  
so that there is really only one logical conclusion.**

**I need darkness as much as I need light.”**

We need the darkness of tonight-  
Ash Wednesday.

The reason we celebrate Ash Wednesday at all  
Is because ashes are a many sided symbol-  
the burnt out fire,  
the cleansing power,  
Emblem of the fact that eventually  
we  
all of us  
die and decompose.

But how is any of this good news?  
How does Ash Wednesday and all of Lent  
prepare us for Easter?

In all these facets of ashes  
And their dark meanings  
there runs a single theme:

Accept death on its own terms.  
So that you may Accept life on its own terms also.

To do this  
We need to slow down.

There is in our American culture  
the chronic need to always be doing something –  
if not something productive,

at least something entertaining.

We fill our days with calendared events,  
We fill our vision with screens of dancing , moving, speaking figures  
From U tube,  
Cable tv  
And the latest news from the White House.

Sometimes we even get frenetic  
about finding peace and serenity.

Go look at the self help section at Barnes and Noble-  
Its full of books telling us  
The secrets of  
How to find meaning,  
How to be happy.  
How to live more fully.

Its an obsession.

We laughed at George Costanza's father  
from the TV show Seinfeld  
because  
when he got on a kick,  
he would yell  
in his loudest voice  
"SERENITY NOW!".

Our spirituality can get that way  
if we are not careful,

Substituting much activity,  
for simply being.

Substituting quantities of busying ourselves  
And doing things  
For the one thing really needful-  
Inner peace, love, joy.

Our Lenten theme this year,  
Is welcome to the quiet,

Welcoming the quiet  
will help prepare us for Easter  
by getting us to slow down,  
quiet ourselves,  
and receive the serenity we need.

Ash Wednesday is the darkened doorway to that quiet.

From beyond that darkened door God calls us to  
Quietness,  
Stillness,  
Mindfulness  
Serenity.

Amen.