



Diocese of Port Pirie Chancery

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Pastoral Letter for the Season of Lent 2019 to the Christian Faithful of the Archdiocese of Adelaide and the Diocese of Port Pirie

Dear Sisters and Brothers

On Ash Wednesday one year ago a school shooting massacre occurred at the Parkland High School in Florida, resulting in seventeen deaths and a large number of wounded. Displayed prominently was a photo of anguished mothers arriving at the school to find out whether or not their child was a victim. One mother hugs another, and on her forehead is traced very visibly the cross she had received at an Ash Wednesday ceremony. "Dust to dust, ashes to ashes" was a refrain she heard that morning and would never have guessed how tragedy might visit her so starkly and so soon.

As a Church we are experiencing dark days, and the refrain of "dust to dust, ashes to ashes" is not without its meaning for us. We have the knowledge of victims of abuse whose lives were reduced to ashes, and are still tormented with sorrow. We have the disillusion, scandal and real grief confronting anybody named as Catholic in these days. In human terms we have the shock of the sudden death of one of the most revered priests in our community, Mgr Denis Edwards. His brother priests are devastated by his untimely loss, so that even while we profess our faith in the fullness of life into which Denis has entered, our human loss is so keen. "Dust to dust, ashes to ashes" is a real refrain in this case.

Ashes and dirt are basic items in our world. They are symbols of the plainness and origins and destiny of human existence. At the Easter Vigil the liturgy would have us light the Holy Fire by striking a spark from a flint, light and fire and life from inert and lifeless matter, a powerful picture of the resurrection where from dust and ashes arises the new life of the Risen Christ. In Genesis, when we were created, we were moulded from clay and earth, and into this lump of dead matter the Lord breathed His Spirit, and dead stuff became alive. The breath of God has been breathed into us, and dead matter was transformed into the image and likeness of God. In Lent we must look at our interior lives, breathed into by the Spirit, and shape our hearts to be adequate places of God's presence. "Behold, I make all things new".

May all those suffering in different ways, may we ourselves individually, and may the Church of God at large thrill with new life through this Lent as we journey towards Easter.

Yours in Christ

+ Gregory O'Kelly SJ
Apostolic Administrator
Bishop of the Diocese of Port Pirie