

Today is *Ash Wednesday*. Traditionally, it's a day of fasting that marks the beginning of Lent, the 40-day period of self-reflection and introspection that comes before, Easter.

As I have grown older, I have realized that life happens in seasons, so it's important for us to grieve what has passed: whether that is a lost loved one, a lost job, a lost marriage, a lost opportunity, so that then *we can live what is yet to be.* Lent reminds us of all of our past seasons – past years: that for every personal resurrection there has to be a death, and for every death a resurrection is possible no matter how dark it seems. Transition and change is part of life.

... The Irish poet, *William Butler Yeats*, has given us a poem he calls, "Easter 1916." The poem recalls an act of terrorism: On Easter Sunday, 1916, sixteen ordinary Irishmen blew up a Dublin bank in protest of the English occupation of Northern Ireland.

In the poem, Yeats tells of time spent he with these friends, men and women, both; he remembers their mornings over coffee, and evenings together in a pub; he recalls the relaxed way in which their lives seemed to be and how

things had always been, and he imagined how things would always be: and then came, Easter of 1916; Afterwards - he would write:

“Now all is changed, changed utterly / A terrible beauty is born.”

He reminds us of all of those things and people that we take for granted in our own lives; and the way in which we hope: “things will always be the same.” But, alas – we all know nothing stays the same; for we all move forward, and we all grow older no matter how hard we exercise or try cling onto the past. For we know too well that life can change with a phone call, a text, or, perhaps, as we see all too often these days - a terrible situation into which we are suddenly thrust.

Hence the possibilities then for us in the terrible beauty of Ash Wednesday: we are marked with ashes, made from palms that just a year ago were lifted high in the Palm Sunday Mass in order to praise Jesus who comes to offer blessings and salvation to all the world.

We do not preserve these palms from year to year; we don't put them away each year. We intentionally burn them to ash

to remind ourselves that everything and every human being will one day turn to dust and ash.

God has already revealed our human future. One glance at a cemetery, reminds us that everyone dies regardless of income or social status. One visit to a funeral home should convince us; we don't take anything/nothing with us.

So Lent can become a season of real hope on this side of heaven if we let it, and with these ashes on our foreheads we can go forth to love and serve God and others, and somehow be changed into what God intends for each of us to become. 40 days of new possibilities - begin today.