

Beyond the Mind

Ash Wednesday

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Fr. Tony Davis

Today begins our season of repentance and conversion. Over the next 40 days, we will be encouraged to give something up, work on our moral behavior, make God number one in our lives, and pray more. It is unfortunate that these words- repentance and conversion- take on a negative connotation. They are presented as something we *have* to do. They might even make us feel bad about ourselves as we realize how far we are from God and how much work we need to do to get closer to God.

The word that we are trying to emphasize in Lent is actually a Greek word: *metanoia*. *Metanoia* literally can mean, 'to go beyond the mind.' We have translated it as repent, but that paints the word in a negative light. 'To go beyond the mind' isn't a bad or condemning concept; it is more neutral if anything. The goal of Lent is not so much to beat ourselves up and take on harsh practices. The goal is *metanoia*, to go beyond our mind.

In his new book, *The Universal Christ*, Fr. Richard Rohr notes that God is all around us. We don't have to do anything to bring God here. We live in a 'Christ-soaked world.' The only part of us that doesn't understand that is our mind. Our mind gets in the way of our instinctive openness and awareness to God. He writes, "I have never been separate from God, nor can I be, except in my mind." (*Another Name for Everything*, 44) I think he is right. The inner chatter of our minds with all its rationalizations and commentaries block us from God's immediate presence. Our minds talk us out of God's nearness and our own self-worth.

As we enter this season of Lent, let us pray that all of our practices may be in the service of *metanoia*, moving beyond our minds, for when we move beyond our minds, we can finally create a space to return to the Lord with our whole heart.