

Homily for Ash Wednesday

'For truly I say to you, they have received their reward.'

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It is always best to have one's way. This is what we believe more than anything else.

To have options, to choose which option one wants, and to have it; this we call freedom.

I recall my father, an ardent anticommunist, telling me as a child that the glory of the liberal western countries, as opposed to the Soviet East, was not the rule of law or the freedom of the press, but that when one goes to the grocery store, one could choose from six different brands of Vienna Sausage. In our modern mind, this is the glory of civilization. The freedom to choose.

We worship this freedom, whether it is in putting our own flair on how we decorate, or 'having it your own way' with our fast food. Whether it be something as small as deciding how well done our steak is, or as serious as how many children we have, for the right to make such decisions are argued favorably under the banner of being 'pro-choice.'

So fiercely do we as a people struggle on behalf of such freedom to choose that we have formed an entire political system around it; this thing we call 'Democracy.' [which we so dearly desire to spread around the world.]

In former times, it was said that 'Monarchy is the best form of government, as long as the king is good.' To us now, we do not care if the king is good or bad. All kings are tyrants. It is only good that we decide everything for ourselves, whether we decide to go down the path of devils or the path of angels. It is all good, for we chose it.

We follow the Latin adage, *vox populi, vox dei*, 'the voice of the people is the voice of God.' This is how much we think of ourselves, and of our opinions, that a

majority vote is commensurate to the will of the Almighty. [We justify the greatest evils our civilization has ever produced with the trite comment that 'the people wanted it.']

As I have mentioned before, I remember, when I was still young, the joy we Americans had when in Afghanistan they held their first elections. Afghan women danced in the streets, their thumbs stained with purple dye, showing that they had voted for the first time in their lives. And we celebrated with them, not caring one bit what exactly they had voted for. We only cared that they had made a choice, whether it be good or evil.

It was a beautiful image, to see their thumbs colored in a regal, imperial purple, even as a pastor's thumb is tarnished in a deathly black on this Wednesday, a day of ash, having marked the foreheads of his people, a people who made a choice.

In Lent, we enter a time of repentance. No one repents of circumstances that he happens to suffer, for he did not choose such circumstances. One repents of a sin that one decided to commit. And this fast of forty days, we cast our eyes down on the sin we all chose to commit in Adam, and in Eve, the sin to dethrone our King, who is good, and to follow the will of ourselves, that is, of the people.

For we believed even then that all kings are tyrants, and we demanded Democracy, we demanded our own way. And this we were given.

Even as the pastor's thumb is black, and the Afghani woman's is purple, now our minds bear the ashes, ashes which we chose, because when told by God '*before you stands the way of life, and the way of death, choose life,*' we despised the Lord, and chose death, even death as a living tree burned to nothing.

For we chose this life, and every day we choose it again, that every day we may be discovered as guilty. A life where we are governed by no God, commanded by no authority, abiding by no law except the law that we have all chosen to accept. A law that allows all hatred, as long as it does not lead to violence; all envy, as long as it does not lead to stealing; all lies, as long as it is not under oath; and all adultery, no matter what it leads to.

We chose this life. We chose this world. The divine monarchy has ended, that this putrid democracy might flourish, for we killed our King, that we might have our own way. We demanded what our sinful hearts decided, and now *we have*

received our reward.

One might think it strong to say that we murdered the king, and committed regicide. But let us walk now, for forty days. Let us ascend the mountain, for something lies up there for us to see. A body, mounted upon a tree, bleeding and hated, gasping and despised.

Walk then, these forty days, to behold your King, *whom you crucified.*

Approach him, even as a heathen soldier, and take your lance, and pierce his side, that blood and water might flow out.

Murder the Son, and curse the Father. Kill the king, and defile the kingdom, that you might finally realize, as the gore flows and covers your hand, that you have failed in your mission to unfetter yourself from the Law of God, nor free yourself from the rule of Christ. The democracy of man is over. For:

'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'

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Preached by Pastor Fields