



## Ash Wednesday Devotion

There are different kinds of ash.

There is the beautiful black ash we use for ceremony. We burn the dried-up palm branches from the previous year's Palm Sunday parades and remember the joy of inviting Jesus into worship. These are placed on our foreheads we are told to remember that we are dust and that to dust we will return.

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I remember placing ashes on my own forehead during our conference's Act of Repentance with Indigenous People service. Nearly 1500 of us gathered and found small squares of burlap and bowls of black ash at our tables. We had been hearing history and stories that week from Native leaders who gave some of the truth of American history, and by the time we touched those bowls of ash, I thought of the ashes of the ones who had died striving to protect their land and their way of life.

I think now of those who live striving to protect their land and their way of life. I think of the ashes gathering in the warming campfire where young people sat in a circle on the Standing Rock Reservation telling the events of their water protection efforts, of the big black snake (pipeline) that threatened their way of life. These young people were living there for months on end, standing ground, sleeping in tipis, wearing "Water is Life" t shirts. On that day they were sharing with our own Native American International Caucus youth who had come to support them and to pray. Our youth gifted them with 1000 tobacco bundles over which they had prayed and tied with blood red ribbon. Those bundles would in time become the ashes of the prayer ceremonies at Standing Rock.

I think of the ashes of burnt down villages and burnt down businesses, where people have stood ground for as long as they could against unfair treatment and racism and hatred, until they had to flee or die for the sins of others. I think of those ashes.

I think also of the beautiful red clay pottery which held the ashes of my beloved one and am so grateful that I had those ashes to keep awhile and then to place in a ceremonial way in the ground to honor that loved one. Then I think of mothers and fathers whose beloved ones have not come home at all. I think of Missing Indigenous Girls and Women who have been stolen away and are either enslaved or are murdered. Those families do not even have their ashes, but instead the uncertainty of what has happened to their beautiful indigenous girls. They hang empty red dresses on their porches and in the trees like haunting ghosts of women who have been taken, hoping someone will take notice and say, "Those girls matter."

As I place the ashes on my forehead, I remember we are dust, yet we mattered enough for Jesus to come into this world to show God's love for us. All of us. He showed us that although we are dust, we are also spirit. Our spirits do not die. Spirits live forever.

After the dust has cleared, we will see the truth. The scales will fall from our eyes like ash, and we will see what we have done and what has been left undone. So let us build campfires and gather, telling the truth and telling the stories of the people. Telling the truth matters. Water matters. Land matters. Children matter. What we do matters.

***Respectfully submitted,***

***Carol Eastin***

***Native American Inter-Tribal Caucus (NAIC) Member***