

## **Return to Me – A Reflection for Ash Wednesday 2021**

In the Gospel for Ash Wednesday, Jesus tells his followers not to show off their fasting and to pray in the inner rooms of their homes. These words take on new meaning this year - unable to be marked by ashes, restricted to our homes, our prayers are private but no less fervent. This year we mark our hearts and not our heads. May the loss of traditional Ash Wednesday observance be the first thing we let go in deepening our Lenten journey. Remember the call to return to God,

### **Scripture – Joel 2:12-13**

A reading from the prophet Joel

“Even now, says the LORD,  
return to me with your whole heart,  
with fasting, and weeping, and mourning;  
Rend your hearts, not your garments,  
and return to the LORD, your God.”

### **Reflection**

God asks for our whole hearts, with our grief, our sacrifice, and our sorrow. Breathe deeply.

- Visualize yourself. How do you come before the God this year on Ash Wednesday? Take that posture that most represents your inner spirit.
- In the inner room of your heart, ask yourself what limits do you put on God’s love of you?
- What is standing between you and the God who knows and loves you?
- How will you use this Lent to remove your limitations on God’s love? How will you use this Lent to move closer to God who made, loves and cares for you?

As we begin our walk with Jesus to the cross and resurrection, we unite our mortality and limits to Christ’s own suffering and passion in order that we might enjoy his divine life as well. To mark the beginning of your journey this Lent, trace a cross on your forehead and repeat the ancient words, **You are dust and to dust you shall return.**

### **Prayer**

*God, you chose to limit yourself for the sake of your people. Let me walk you this Lent as I face my own limitations and seek to be your presence in the world. Create in me a clean heart that I might know, love, and serve you better through my service of others. Amen.*

This prayer is a joint work of the Catholic Health Association and the National Association of Catholic Chaplains.