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Reimagining Ash Wednesday: stardust to stardust

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When I was young, I remember thinking about that phrase priests use on Ash Wednesday when they place the ashes on your forehead: "Remember (whomever) that you are dust and unto dust you shall return." Although we can profitably be reminded of our mortality from time to time, this always struck me as a bit morbid.

Of course, since Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent, the ashes also announced the beginning of a season-long effort to repent wrongs, seek a new path and follow the Gospel.

In recent years, I was introduced to the world of environmental/cosmological spirituality in which we emphasize and celebrate our oneness with all creation, our unity with the entire universe. It's based on scientific accounts of the unfolding of God's creation, which happened quite a bit differently than the way it's told in Genesis. Humanity, like all other life, got its seed planted with the "Big Bang" as particles of matter sped out from the core. Over billions of years, this led to the creation of solar systems, planets and eventually many forms of life, including human life. We are literally made from the same "stuff" as the stars and planets!

So here's a proposed re-wording of that Ash Wednesday ritual: "Remember (whomever) that you are *star*dust and unto *star*dust you shall return." This could be a call to repent our ways of treating the universe -- or at least our planet -- so badly. It's another way of saying, "You are part of the universe ... now, go and behave like you cared about it."

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