



On Ash Wednesday we hear, **“Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”** The words remind me where I’ve come from: God’s own hand drew man from the dust and called him to love. The words remind me that this life is not eternal, that I will die, that the supreme moment of death requires preparation, a daily living for eternity.

Yet I don’t experience this “returning to dust” in my day-to-day life, or do I? Perhaps its better to remind ourselves, “Remember that you are weakness and to weakness you shall return.”

Saint Paul had this experience of weakness: *“a thorn in the flesh was given to me ... to beat me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I begged the Lord about this, that it might leave me, but he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.” I will rather boast most gladly of my weaknesses, in order that the power of Christ may dwell with me. Therefore, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and constraints, for the sake of Christ; for when I am weak, then I am strong”* (2 Cor 12:7-10).

Paul suffered from this mysterious “thorn in the flesh,” and I too have a constant experience of my weaknesses. Probably more so in Lent. I mean, I make resolutions and fail. I fast two days obligatorily out of the whole year and I can’t help but complain how much I “suffer.” I fail or I hurt—either way my weakness gets the better of me!

But Paul’s “thorn” helped him turn to God and trust in him even more.

Lent helps us come to terms with our daily weaknesses and helps us to do a little “returning to dust” each day. This prepares us for the Easter, to learn to rise with Christ and begin again and again to depend more on his grace than on our (lack of) strength. Each year becomes a preparation to receive that ultimate resurrection grace at death.

“If we have died with him, we shall also live with him” (2 Tim 2:11).