

Sermon for Ash Wednesday
by Fr. Garrin W. Dickinson
Holy Nativity, Plano
25 February, 2009

I have a confession to make. In college, I majored in Literature. That's not the confession. But I didn't major in Literature just because I had to pick something. I majored in Literature because I actually like Literature. I am one of those strange people who sometimes read Shakespeare for fun. There is something about *stories* that I find compelling. Especially the classic stories.

Now I want us to think about the story of creation, from the very beginning to the very end. (We are somewhere in the middle.) And the question I have is this: Are we living in a tragedy or a comedy? The difference is not just that a tragedy is sad and a comedy is funny. The difference is that the resolution of a tragedy is death, while the resolution of a comedy is new life. Students usually say it this way: At the end of a tragedy, everybody dies. At the end of a comedy there's a wedding. Which reflects the reality in which we live?

If we look at it from a human perspective, life is a tragedy. Think about it. We all die in the end. And we die because of our own faults. "Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming, it is near, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness!"

On the other hand, we are not the author of the story. And the author has decreed otherwise. "For our sake, he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." So, you see, one way of describing the work of Jesus Christ is to say that he turns the cosmic tragedy of our disobedience and sin into a cosmic comedy that ends in the marriage supper of the Lamb.

But here's the thing. Most people cheat. Most people try to have the comedy without acknowledging the tragedy. If Jesus is not the Lord of your life, then your life is still a tragedy. There is no way around it. Without Jesus we die in our sins. Yet there are whole industries out there devoted to the attempt to be happy without having to deal with God. Here's the truth: Anyone who tells you that you can live in a cosmic comedy without Jesus is either selling something or smoking something.

And so we come to Ash Wednesday, when we Christians remind ourselves that we will inevitably return to the dust, that everything in this fallen world will be burnt to ashes. We embrace our tragedy, knowing that by being honest about it we can accept the author's solution. We respond to Christ's call to "be reconciled to God." And by doing so, we experience the change of *genre*. We know that, through ashes, we are invited to come to the Lord's Table, and eventually to his wedding feast.