

In the name of God
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Not too long ago I heard an interview on NPR's *Fresh Air with Terry Gross* where she interviewed physician B. J. Miller.

When Miller was a college sophomore he was out late one night with some friends, and as a lark they climbed onto a parked commuter train. In a freak accident, he was electrocuted and nearly died. He eventually lost both legs below the knee and half of one arm. The experience led him to pursue a career in end-of-life care and palliative medicine.

In the interview I heard, he discussed the book he co-authored with Shoshana Berger titled *A Beginner's Guide to the End – Practical Advice for Living Life and Facing Death*.

One of the things they recommend in the book, as a way to not leave a mess behind for your family to have to clean up, is to create a death file with all your relevant documents and instructions. And he told the story about how when they were writing the book, they would catch each other calling it an “**if** I die file” when in fact it’s a “**when** I die file.” Because whether or not we will die is not in question.

Death is inevitable – and that is what Ash Wednesday asks us to unflinchingly look at every year. With the smearing of ash on our foreheads, and the admonition that we are dust and to dust we shall return, we are reminded that we all die.

The Latin expression *memento mori*, translated as “remember your death,” symbolizes the church’s practice of remembering our death as a way of leading us to live lives worthy of our calling as followers of Christ.

Memento mori is not an ending however, it is a beginning. *Memento mori* focuses us as we enter the holy season of Lent, remembering that Lent is a 40 day journey from death to resurrection, bookended by Ash Wednesday on one side and Easter Day on the other. One holds the deep truth that we all die, and the other the deep truth that death does not have the final word.

So we begin here – with ashes and remembering our death – entering a season of renewal through self-examination and repentance, by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God’s Word.

All of these practices are about reconciliation – that is literally reconciling how we live our lives with how we say we want to live our lives as followers of Christ.

And so we take this time for self-examination and to re-center God in our lives. We repent to God and to each (and to ourselves) for the ways in which we have fallen short. We take our prayer life seriously. We fast from things that draw us away from God and from community. We make time to read and reflect on holy scripture.

It sounds like a lot – and it is a lot. And sometimes our lives are so full of inner conflict, anxiety, and despair that just existing feels penitential.¹ So start with one thing, a thing that catches your heart, and go from there.

¹ Taken from a Facebook post by the Rev. David Peters.

Pick up a Lenten touchstone and use it as a reminder to pray regularly. Grab a Lenten devotional from the resource table and spend 10 minutes a day in reflection and contemplation. Take a fast from something (or someone) that drains your energy. Pick one thing that helps you make your life look more like you want it to.

It doesn't have to be perfect. You don't have to be perfect. You just have to mean it. You just have follow Jesus as best as you can every day.

That's what Lent is for, after all. The Church in her wisdom knew that we needed a season set aside yearly to course correct – to press the reset button and try again. Lent is a gift, not a punishment.

So remember your death, yes – but remember, too, the abundance of life God promises to those who trust in him, and that he will be with us every step of the way.

~ Amen ~