



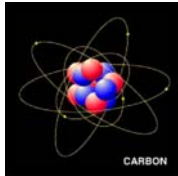
Franciscan Action Network

Transforming the World in the Spirit of St. Francis and St. Clare

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Ash Wednesday: Carbon in Creation

“Remember that you are carbon, and to carbon you will return.”



After creating carbon, God saw that it was good. Carbon is the sixth element in the periodic table and the chemical basis of life. It is abundant in the sun, stars, comets, and the atmospheres of most planets. Carbon is second to oxygen as the most common element in the human body and makes up 18.5 percent of our mass.

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Carbon is the most highly relational atom in God’s creation, with an affinity for bonding with other small atoms. Scientists have discovered almost 10 million different combinations of carbon with other elements. Carbon is also a most useful creature, serving humans in food, wood, petroleum products, plant and animal fibers in clothing, steel, graphite, charcoal, ink, and diamonds.

In its three most popular natural forms, carbon is a witness to the diversity of God’s creation. Graphite is soft, opaque, and a good conductor of electricity, while diamonds are extremely hard, transparent, and poor conductors. We receive the third form of carbon, amorphous carbon, on our foreheads on Ash Wednesday as a sign of our humility as one in being with all created matter and of our need for repentance to re-establish right relationship with other creatures and with God. We remember that we are carbon, and to carbon we will return.

Our carbon ashes call us to penance as a reminder of the particular ways in which our relationship to creation needs healing. We speak of reducing our “carbon footprint” not because carbon is bad, but because our excessive use of carbon and other resources upsets the complex harmony of life on earth. God made carbon to be good. As holy water sanctifies the ashes we receive at Mass, may we allow Christ’s life in us to sanctify and renew our relationship with carbon, and all of creation, this Lent.

ASH WEDNESDAY MORNING PRAYER

Intercession:

May we turn from abuse of your creation,
--and seek your will for all that you have made.

ASH WEDNESDAY EVENING PRAYER

Intercession:

Inspire all peoples with gratitude for the fruits of the earth,
--that our care for these gifts may honor you as Creator.

