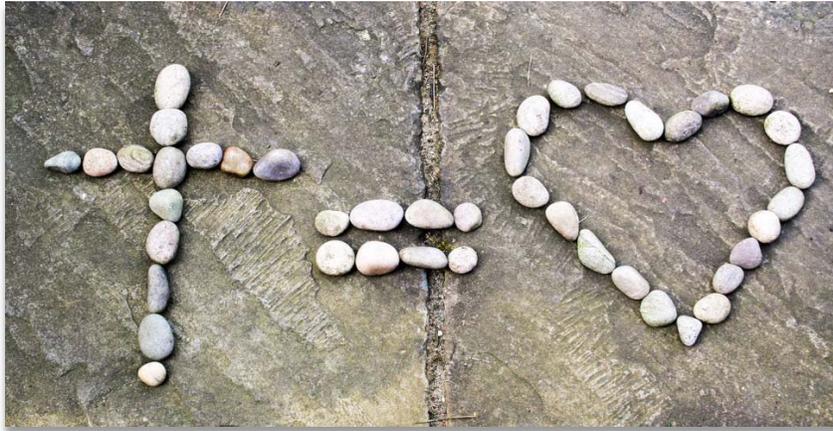


# President's Piece for Peace

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February 14<sup>th</sup> will present quite the contrast between our culture and the Church this year. For most in this nation, including many in the Church, it will be a day of sentimental phrases and romantic notions inside a red and white greeting card. The “I Love You” words will be expressed in traditional as well as new and creative ways. The sweet gift of dark chocolates will be boarded by a heart shape box bound in silky ribbon. Reservations for special suppers by candle light may complete the day. These are fine and good customs that are the kind of love known to us.

The hymn writer informs us of another love. “My Song Is Love Unknown.” This love is the contrast to February 14<sup>th</sup>. This year the Church celebrates Ash Wednesday on February 14<sup>th</sup>. It provides for us a love that is unknown to us by nature. A love that is not full of sentiment or romantic notions. It is a love that is “My Savior’s love to me.”

On this February 14<sup>th</sup>, as you gather at the altar to receive the ashes and hear the words “from dust you have come, to dust you will return”, it is a time to focus on a love unknown. On Ash Wednesday there are no cards with poems or stanzas of human emotion. There are hymns in minor key with words of sorrow. It is a love that cannot be generated by anything other than a divine heart and an altruistic motive. Jesus is the singer of the song of love that is unknown. Its lyrics don’t rhyme but they are meaningful. He sings out “Father forgive them for they know not what they do.” The sweet darkness of the cross is covered in His flow of crimson red that makes full atonement for your sins, not His. The special supper adorned by the candles of the Chancel feed you the sacrificed Body and Blood of the Savior for the forgiveness of your sins and strengthening of faith in Christ.

There is really nothing new about this love, nothing created by the hand of man. It is a love that is from God to us in the person of His Beloved Son. We didn’t ask for Him, we have not earned Him, we even have a difficult time appreciating Him every second of the day. Yet He brings a love to the loveless that we might lovely be. This February 14<sup>th</sup> is a day for the Church to proudly wear the ashes in the form of the cross on our foreheads. It is a witness to the world who does not know this love nor can they apart from the Holy Spirit making it known. It is a day for us to reflect on the depth of Jesus’ commitment to save us at dire cost to Himself, yet did so willingly and perfectly.

Go ahead and celebrate your love for your spouse and let them know they are apart from all others in this world. That is good and fine with ample history behind it. At the same time this February 14<sup>th</sup> is also a time set apart from sentiment and romantic notions. It is a day and a time preparing us for the long journey of Lententide. God bless you all in this purple season of the Church. God give you repentant hearts that yearn for the Grace of God in all its abundance. May this season be for you, as you preach and teach, the song of love unknown made known.