



Ash Wednesday

“Remember that you are dust and dust you shall return.”

OR

“Turn away from sin and believe in the Gospel”

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent. The reception of ashes on our foreheads is an opportunity to enter into Lent in a meaningful and intentional way. Along with receiving ashes, we hear the the words, “Remember that you are dust and dust you shall return,” or “Turn away from sin and believe in the Gospel ” to bring us into a penitential disposition.

Ash Wednesday is a day of penitential prayer and fasting we are asked to reflect during the 40 days of Lent on the Gospel and how we are living according to its teachings.

Palms to Ashes

Ashes are a sacramental. Sacramentals are sacred signs instituted by the Church. A Sacramental is an object or an action which is regarded as encouraging devotion and thus spiritually aiding the person who uses it. The ashes are made from the blessed palms used in the Palm Sunday celebration of the previous year. They are blest with Holy Water and are scented by exposure to incense. While the ashes symbolize penance and contrition, they are also a reminder that God is gracious and merciful to those who call on God.



Sprinkling history and Covid-19

The sprinkling of ashes originated in the Jewish faith as penitents were sprinkled with ashes. Sprinkling ashes on the crown of the head recalls the biblical method of putting on sackcloth and ashes as a sign of penance: “Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the people of Israel were assembled with fasting and in sackcloth, and with earth upon their heads” (Neh 9:1). Later it was introduced in the early church as ashes were used to sprinkle the penitential garb of converts which were worn on Ash Wednesday. As Lent begins in the United States, the custom is to mark the cross on a person’s forehead, but in other parts of the world, including in Italy, the ashes are sprinkled on a person’s head.

This year, receiving ashes will look different for most of us as the Church is mindful of keeping God’s people safe from the pandemic. The words will be said once for the faith community gathered. People will then come forward and ashes will be sprinkled on the crown of each individual’s head. The words will only be spoken once to the whole community, not spoken as the ashes are sprinkled,

Three Disciplines of Lent: Prayer + Fast + Almsgiving

During the entire Lenten season we are to be reflective and prayerful, live simply and fast and give generously of our treasure to those in need. We **fast** to allow our physical hunger to remind us of our spiritual hunger, our need for God. The purpose of fasting is to turn our attention to both God and others. **Prayer** allows us to deepen our relationship with God and to help us follow Jesus more closely. **Almsgiving** helps us practice charitable acts as we are called to be compassionate to those in need.

See the following page for ideas to practice prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

Lent ¹ is a Season for....

- making time and space to remember what it means to be Christian, by remembering the life, death and resurrection of Jesus in a special way.
- remembering the life and message of Jesus—recommitting to living as followers of Jesus in today’s world.
- giving up the negative in our lives to make room for more positive.
- being open to change of heart and habit—to deepening our relationship with Jesus and with each other.
- taking time out from the usual daily routine to focus on what is most important in our lives.
- acknowledging the parts of our lives that need forgiveness and changing, and working to make them right again.
- clearing out some space in our lives so that God can enter and fill it; and taking time to discover where God has always been.

The Three Disciplines of Lent: *Fasting, Prayer, Almsgiving*

<p>Fasting: Fasting is an integral part of Lent. Traditionally it has included reducing the amount of food we eat and abstaining from meat. We fast to allow our physical hunger to remind us of our spiritual hunger, our need for God. The purpose of fasting is to turn our attention to both God and others.</p> <p>Things to fast from...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • watching television • foul language, sarcasm, and put-downs. • buying new things: clothes, music, magazines, jewelry, etc. • snack or junk foods • spending money on entertainment • being angry at other people • holding resentments • gossiping • being dishonest <p>Feasting: The dictionary defines a feast as “something that gives unusual or abundant pleasure.” Jesus tells us what gives us the most real and lasting joy: it is sharing ourselves in love for others, for our friends, our family, and also for our neighbors in need. During Lent, we pay attention to feasting on joy, compassion, service, and hope so that we might grow in faith all year long.</p> <p>Things to feast on...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • prayer • acts of kindness to others • forgiveness • participating at Church • participating in liturgy and Eucharist • giving our time in service • receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation • acts of service and charity • giving money or personal possessions to people who are hungry or in need 	<p>Prayer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read the story of the Last Supper of Jesus in chapter 13 of the Gospel of John, verses 1-15. • Read the story of Easter chapter 20 of the Gospel of John, verses 1-9. • Pray the “Our Father” three times today—in the morning when you get up, at noontime, and when you go to bed. • Say a prayer for someone who is sick today. • Pray for a forgiving heart and ask the people you have hurt to forgive you. • Participate in Ash Wednesday services with your family. • Participate in the Stations of the Cross during Lent. • List three blessings you have been given. Say a prayer to God, giving thanks for the blessings in your life. • Pray for the children and families who are homeless, and think about ways you and your family might help them. • Pray the Rosary. • Go to a website like Catholic Online for specific Lenten prayers: www.catholic.org/prayers/prayer.php?s=27 	<p>Almsgiving (Acts of Charity)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show an act of kindness to each family member today. • Show an act of kindness to a friend and to someone who is difficult to like. • Together with your family, spend time serving others during Lent. Work at a soup kitchen or homeless shelter. Visit elderly people who are in nursing homes or shut-ins. • Bring food or clothing to the parish or community food pantry, food bank, or homeless shelter. • Do someone else’s chores one day this week. • Donate a new item of children’s clothing to the local homeless shelter or clothing center. • Go through your closet and find some clothes in good shape to give away to others who are in need. • Write a letter or create a card for someone who is sick or might be lonely. • Buy a can of food to give to a food bank or homeless shelter. • Talk with your family about eating one simple meal each week of Lent and putting the money you save in the Operation Rice Bowl box or giving the money to a soup kitchen or homeless shelter.
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¹ From Generations of Faith by John Roberto.