

Ash Wednesday

17 February



About Ash Wednesday

Today marks the beginning of Lent. We begin Lent by with the distribution of ashes.

In the early Church, Lent was a time for the reconciliation of public penitents. The penitents would come to Church at the beginning of Lent - Ash Wednesday. They would wear a penitential garment, suggesting sackcloth (as we hear in the First Reading of today's liturgy), and be sprinkled with ashes. Then they would be ritually expelled from the congregation to do their penance for forty days and return to the Church on Holy Thursday, when they would be readmitted to the Sacraments. In the Scriptures, sackcloth and ashes are signs of penance.

As time went on, the practice of expelling penitents disappeared, but the ashes have stayed and became a call to penance for all the faithful.

The ashes are made by burning olive branches and palm branches from last year's Palm Sunday Mass. This practice reminds us that Lent begins the journey towards Easter.

What can we learn from Ash Wednesday?

Lent is a journey – we are journeying towards the glory of Easter, where we celebrate Christ truly risen from the dead. For us to truly celebrate Christ's resurrection we enter the desert with him for the next forty days. Lent is marked by three activities: prayer, fasting and almsgiving. However, these three aspects of the season must be undertaken with a willing heart and should make us better people, more faithful followers of the Gospel and truer witnesses to Christ. We leave our needs and wants behind in order that we may better serve others.

When the ashes are distributed:

"Remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return", or

"Repent and believe in the Gospel."

Both formulae express beautifully what this time of Lent is about: that we must turn away from sin and live our lives for Christ. They also serve to remind us that one day we will leave this earth and meet the Lord face to face. Let us use our time on earth to prepare to meet the Risen Christ, that our encounter with Him will be a most joyful one.

May this time of Lent be a time of grace, renewal and encounter with Christ and a time of service to our neighbour, so that Lent will truly be a 'time of favour' from the Lord.

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Collect

Grant, O Lord, that we may begin with holy fasting
this campaign of Christian service,
so that, as we take up battle against spiritual evils,
we may be armed with weapons of self-restraint.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel

Matthew 6:1-6,16-18

Your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you

Jesus said to his disciples:

'Be careful not to parade your good deeds before men to attract their notice;
by doing this you will lose all reward from your Father in heaven.

So when you give alms,

do not have it trumpeted before you;

this is what the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets to win men's admiration.

I tell you solemnly, they have had their reward.

But when you give alms, your left hand must not know what your right is doing;

your almsgiving must be secret,

and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you.

'And when you pray, do not imitate the hypocrites:

they love to say their prayers standing up in the synagogues

and at the street corners for people to see them;

I tell you solemnly, they have had their reward.

Ash Wednesday

17 February



But when you pray, go to your private room and,
when you have shut your door,
pray to your Father who is in that secret place,
and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you.

‘When you fast do not put on a gloomy look as the hypocrites do:
they pull long faces to let men know they are fasting.
I tell you solemnly, they have had their reward.

But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face,
so that no one will know you are fasting except your Father who sees all that is done in secret; and
your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you.’

Antiphon

He who ponders the law of the Lord day and night will yield fruit in due season.

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Lenten Hymn – Ash Wednesday

Refrain:

In this time of Lent we now turn
away from sin, temptation spurn.
Denying self in all we do
to serve Christ and our neighbour too.

(Collect)

In fasting, almsgiving and prayer,
we'll spend the days of this campaign.
Turning our minds to things above
as from earth's pleasures we abstain.

2. The ash that is placed on our head
reminds us that we come from dust.
Christ's Gospel we must make our guide
to make our lives more pure and just.

Text and Music: Chris deSilva and
Alessio Loiacono

Other Music Suggestion
[Ashes](#)

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