



Why do we celebrate Ash Wednesday? (February 22, 2023)

In the Roman Catholic Church, Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent; it begins the season of preparation for the resurrection of Jesus Christ on Easter Sunday. Ash Wednesday always falls 46 days before Easter. Since Easter falls on a different date each year, Ash Wednesday likewise does also. While Ash Wednesday is not a Holy Day of Obligation, all Roman Catholics are encouraged to attend Mass or a Service of the Word on this day in order to mark the traditional beginning of the Lent and our preparation for the celebration of Holy Week and Easter liturgies.

The Distribution of Ashes:

During a Service of the Word or Liturgy of the Mass, ashes (which give Ash Wednesday its distinctive name) are distributed. These ashes are made traditionally by burning the blessed palms that were distributed the previous year on Palm Sunday.

After the priest blesses the ashes and sprinkles them with holy water, the faithful come forward to receive them. The priest, deacon or lay minister(s) dips their right thumb in the ashes and, making the Sign of the Cross on each person's forehead, says, "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shalt return", "Repent and believe in the Gospel", or another approved variation.

A Day of Repentance:

The distribution of ashes reminds us of our own mortality and calls us to repentance. In the early Church, Ash Wednesday was the day on which those who had sinned, and who wished to be readmitted to the Church, would begin their public penance. The ashes that we receive are a reminder of our own state of sinfulness, and need for repentance and purification.

Fasting and Abstinence Are Required:

The Church emphasizes the penitential nature of Ash Wednesday by calling us to fast and abstain from meat. Catholics who are over the age of 18 and under the age of 60 are required to fast, which means that we can eat only one complete meal and two smaller ones during the day, with no food in between. Catholics who are over the age of 14 are also required to refrain from eating any meat, or any food made with meat, on Ash Wednesday.

Taking Stock of Our Spiritual Life:

This fasting and abstinence is not simply a visual form of penance, it is also a call for us to take stock of our spiritual lives. As Lent begins, we are encouraged to set out specific spiritual goals we would like to reach before Easter and decide how we will pursue them—for instance, by going to daily Mass when we can and receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation more often.

7:00 a.m. Liturgy of the Word (with distribution of Ashes only)

7:00 p.m. Liturgy of the Mass (with distribution of Ashes & Communion)
