

Faith in Five

Lent: Week 1

Adults

1. **What is Ash Wednesday and why is it so important?** Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of the Lenten season, 40 days where we recognize that in our frailty as human beings, we need the Lord's presence in our lives. Lent culminates with Easter, the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, who was victorious over sin and death! In the Old Testament when people were penitent, or sorrowful, they would dress themselves in sackcloth and put ashes on their head. The practice of receiving ashes on the forehead today symbolizes our willingness to enter this holy season committed to the Lord, sorrowful for our sins and with His help to walk in holiness and into New Life.
2. **Where do the ashes come from?** The ashes come from palms burned from the previous Palm Sunday. They are given during Mass by the priest or a eucharistic minister.
3. **Why are the ashes placed on the forehead in the form of a cross?** The cross is a symbol of our belief in Christ and is placed on our foreheads to keep Christ and His memory on our minds. It is a visual sign to others that we belong to Christ and that we will use the 40 days to prepare ourselves spiritually.
4. **What is the prayer being said when the ashes are placed on the forehead?** There are two prayers typically used when ashes are distributed to the communicant. "Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return" - this reminds us of our need for humility - we are nothing without God. The second prayer which may be used, "Repent and believe in the Gospel", is just that. In order to be in right standing with God, we are encouraged to be truly sorrowful for our sins, and to believe in God's teachings and His Word.
5. **Why do we fast on Ash Wednesday?** Fasting is a form of self-sacrifice that we offer to God. In many ways it demonstrates our need and our hunger for God alone who satisfies. As Catholics, fasting means to consume only one full meal, with two smaller meals that don't add up to a full meal. Those who are elderly or with medical conditions may be exempt from this requirement (depending on your diocese). Fasting is also done on Good Friday, the day Jesus died on the cross for our sins. Catholics observe abstaining from meat on Ash Wednesday, Good Friday and all Fridays. Meat was once considered a luxury and used in celebrations; abstaining from meat is another form of self-denial. On Fridays, we remember the crucifixion and death of our Lord Jesus.

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