

Ash Wednesday

Ash Wednesday marks the first day of Lent, our forty-day journey to Easter. During this solemn season, we recall "the great events that gave us life in Christ" in order that God might bring to perfection in us the image of his Son (cf. Preface for Lent I).

Lent calls us to prayerful reflection, to penance, fasting, and almsgiving. Lent leads us to the holiest week of the liturgical year and to the joyful celebration of Easter.

To set a reflective tone, use these simple Lenten symbols. Weave a purple ribbon around a grapevine wreath, and then place it on a table. Stand one white or purple candle in the center of the wreath and place three nails near it. The wreath and nails symbolize Christ's crucifixion; the purple ribbon, the season of Lent and our need for repentance; and the candle, Christ, our Savior and Light of the world.

Help your children recognize Ash Wednesday as a special day in the liturgical year with the following prayer service. Then celebrate the Eucharist and receive ashes together as a family or school community.

Ash Wednesday Prayer

Have one person light the Lenten candle, one read from Scripture, and one read the prayer.

Leader:

Dear Jesus, open our minds and hearts
that we might hear and follow your word.

*A reading from the Prophet Daniel
9:3-5, 17, 18*

Then, to show my sorrow, I went without
eating and dressed in sackcloth and sat in

ashes. I confessed my sins and earnestly
prayed to the LORD my God: "Our LORD,
you are a great and fearsome God, and you
faithfully keep your agreement with those
who love and obey you. But we have
sinned terribly by rebelling against you
and rejecting your laws and teachings....
I am your servant, LORD God, and I beg
you to answer my prayers.... Please show
mercy to your chosen city, not because we
deserve it, but because of your great
kindness."

Allow time for quiet reflection and then
continue with prayer.

Leader:

Dear Jesus,
today is Ash Wednesday,
the first day of Lent.

It is the beginning
of our forty-day journey
to Easter with you.

Please help us to turn away from sin.
Heal our weakness and make us true
friends of God.

May our sacrifices, prayers,
and kindness to others
bring us closer to you each day.

May the ashes we receive today
be an outward sign of our faith
and our love for you.

All: Amen.

Ash Wednesday

Dear Parent(s),

During this Lenten season, we will be focusing on the many different aspects of Lent: its meaning, its symbols, its customs, and its traditions. Each week your child will bring home Family Take-Home Pages, which will be filled with suggested activities that reinforce what we are discussing and learning in class. With the exception of this first one, these Take-Home Pages will be theme based and divided into three sections: Warm-Up Exercises, Getting Started, and Putting It into Practice.

To help create a reflective Lenten atmosphere to your home, consider using a simple Lenten candle. Take a purple pillar candle and place it in a candle dish. You can place three large nails at the base of the candle. Each night, your family can light the Lenten candle and say together the prayer on the Family Take-Home pages.

The Take-Home Pages for this week cover basic questions and answers about Lenten customs and symbols, and a prayer to share with your family on Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent.

Questions Kids Ask About Lent

Why are we marked with ashes on Ash Wednesday?

In Biblical days, people wore sackcloth and sat in ashes as a sign of penance. Today we receive ashes on Ash Wednesday because it is the beginning of Lent, our season of repentance. When we receive the blessed ashes on our forehead, we hear the words, "Turn from sin and be faithful to the Gospel," or, "Remember that you are dust and unto dust you shall return." Ashes remind us that we are sinners and that we must turn from our sins and grow closer to God.

Where do the ashes come from?

The ashes we receive on our foreheads come from the burnt palms from the previous year's Palm Sunday.

Why are the vestments purple during Lent?

Purple reminds us that Lent is a time of serious commitment to penance and prayerful

reflection. It was also a color worn by kings during ancient times. So it makes sense that the color we associate with Lent would be purple, because during this time we focus on the life of Jesus, the King of kings.

Why does Lent last for forty days?

The Bible uses the number forty repeatedly. The great flood that kept Noah and his family afloat lasted for forty days and forty nights. After fleeing Egypt, the Israelites wandered for forty years in the desert before they entered the Promised Land. Jesus spent forty days and forty nights in the desert preparing for his public ministry. These forty-day or forty-year periods included times of great trials and difficulties, times of searching, reflection, and action. We are also called to reflect on our faith, to search our hearts, and to change our ways during our forty days of Lent.

Why do we say there are forty days of Lent when, according to the calendar, there are more than forty days?

Lent seems longer than forty days, but it actually isn't. Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and ends the evening of Holy Thursday. We don't count Sundays as days of Lent, because we celebrate Christ's Resurrection every Sunday at Mass—that makes Sundays like mini-Easters! So if you count the days starting with Ash Wednesday, skipping Sundays, and ending on Holy Thursday, you'll discover that Lent is exactly forty days.

Why do we "give up" things during Lent?

Lent is a time to be renewed in spirit. The discipline we practice through "giving things up" helps us to control our desires and to grow in our longing for all that is true, good, and beautiful. Voluntary self-denial helps us think of God; it also helps us think of others, too. How? Let's say you give up candy during Lent. By doing so, you save money. Rather than keep the money for yourself, you can give it to charity. Instead of giving something up, some people choose to do something extra, for example, pray a Rosary or help a neighbor in need.

Why do Catholics give up meat on Fridays of Lent?

Lent is an intense season of the Church's penitential practice. Catholics who are 14 years or older do not eat meat on Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, and all other Fridays during Lent. The Church asks all Catholics to make this obligatory penance a part of their Lenten program of self-denial.

Why can't adults eat between meals on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday?

This is another special sacrifice that Catholics between the ages of 18 and 59 are asked to make. It's called fasting. It means that on these days, Catholics can eat one full meal, plus two light meals that together don't

equal a meal, and they can't eat snacks in between. Those younger than 18 are not expected to "fast" from food, but they can "fast" from or give up other things such as sweets, insisting on their own way, or arguing with a sibling or a parent.

Why don't we sing or say "alleluia" during Lent?

The word alleluia, or "hallelu-yah" is of Hebrew origin, meaning "praise God." It is associated with joy and festivity. We "put away" all alleluias during Lent as we reflect on the last days of Jesus' life, and his crucifixion and death. During the Easter season, we sing and pray many alleluias as we celebrate our new life in Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Ash Wednesday Prayer

Jesus,
today is Ash Wednesday,
the first day of Lent.
Blessed ashes mark our faith.
They call us to repentance.
Pardon our sins, O Jesus.
We are sorry for sometimes
choosing not to follow your way.
Please help us start over.
Please help us begin today.
May this season of Lent bring us closer
to you, our Amazing Grace.
May we grow stronger in
our commitment
to follow you more closely, day after day.
Amen.

Together as a family or school community attend Mass on Ash Wednesday and receive ashes as a sign of your willingness to grow closer to Christ during this Lenten season.