

ASH WEDNESDAY

Ash Wednesday is the doorway into our Lenten season of renewal – a day rich in associations and symbolism. It marks the beginning of Lent – a time for turning again to the practice of our faith, in prayer, self-denial (fasting) and practical generosity (almsgiving).

Although it is not a Holy Day of Obligation, many Catholics consider it important to receive ashes on this day. Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of a period of 40 days (Sundays excluded) in which Catholics prepare for Eastertide. This period also represents the 40 days that Jesus spent in the desert as well as the 40 years that the Israelites spent in exile.

The ashes themselves come from the burned palms from last year's Palm Sunday celebration: thus bringing us full circle to our last celebration of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus.

On Ash Wednesday, we are reminded that we are called to turn away from sin, to repent and to believe the Good News of our salvation through Jesus Christ.

Receiving Ashes

An outward sign of an inner step

"As we cross this threshold we customarily receive ashes on our foreheads, in the sign of the cross. This is a public mark of our turning again to God, seeking his mercy, forgiveness and help.

"We use these words: **'Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return'**. Yes, we cannot pretend otherwise. **Or: 'Repent, and believe in the Gospel'**. Yes, we seek the one thing that is absolutely necessary: the grace of God."