

Ash Wednesday

Lent begins with Ash Wednesday, a day on which Catholics traditionally resist eating between meals (fasting) and avoid eating meat (abstaining). Many Catholics also attend Mass or have special prayer liturgies.

Lent is a forty day period preparation for Easter. It reminds us of the forty days that Jesus spent in the wilderness before he took up his ministry. During this time he fasted and prayed. Lent is a time of self-denial and prayer for us as well. During this period, we are called to focus on becoming closer to Jesus by praying a little more, doing good deeds for others, going without something we like and giving generously to others in need. Ash Wednesday is a good time for us to think about what we can do to grow closer to Jesus over the next weeks.

Ashes Prayer

Materials

- Small piece of paper for each person, pens/pencils
- Ribbon or strip of paper with 'Alleluia' written on it (use your streamers from Mardi Gras)
- Flame proof bowl, candle, matches



Prayer

[Light the candle and make the sign of the cross together]

All: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Leader: Scripture says:

'For everything, there is a season,
A time for every matter under heaven:
A time to be born and a time to die;
A time weep and a time to laugh
A time to be sad and a time to dance
A time to speak and a time to keep silence.'

Yesterday we celebrated with with song and gladness. Today we begin our time of silence and sadness. We will not proclaim 'Alleluia' again until we celebrate the risen Lord at Easter.

We now place our streamers out of sight.

[Place streamers in a drawer or box until Easter]

Leader: As we prepare for Easter, we are called to grow closer to Jesus through prayer, service to others and self-denial. Let us listen to God's word.

Reader 1: The Lord says: Come back to me with all your heart, fasting, weeping, mourning. But do not let your hearts be broken, turn to the Lord again for he is tender and compassionate, slow to anger and ready to forgive. The Word of the Lord (Joel 2: 12-13)

All: Thanks be to God.

Leader: Now let us take a moment to think about how we can turn to God with all our heart this Lent. Write on your paper, one thing that you promise to do this Lent to grow closer to Jesus.

[Everyone write down a Lenten promise on their paper]

As I call you name, come forward with your promise, light it from the candle and place it in the bowl to burn.

[Call the names of each person, give assistance to young children if required]

Reader: Lord God, we gather these offerings, our Lenten promises, and burn them in sacrifice to you. You, Lord, know our hearts. You call us to yourself. Help us to keep our promises faithfully throughout Lent.

Leader: Let us bless these ashes.

[All extend a hand over the bowl of ashes].

Leader: Lord God, bless these ashes which are a sign of our desire to grow closer to you. Forgive us for the times we have turned away from you and draw us into your love.

[take a smear of ash on your thumb and make a cross on the forehead of each person saying: "Return to God with all your heart."]

Final Blessing

Reader: We leave our sins behind us.

All: Amen

Reader: We turn to God with prayers and penance.

All: Amen.

Reader: For he is kind and merciful.

All: Amen.

Leader: Let us go forth, keeping our Lenten promises, to love and serve the Lord with all our hearts.

All: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit Amen.

[Keep the ashes and use them throughout Lent during your family prayer times to remind you of your Lenten promises]



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