Ash Wednesday Guide

What is Ash Wednesday?
Ash Wednesday is the first day of the season of Lent. Lent is a season of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving that prepares us for the celebration of Easter. During Lent we focus on repentance, on turning away from our sins and towards Christ. For Catholics, Ash Wednesday is observed through fasting (for those between the ages 18-59) and abstinence from meat (for those 14 years and older). Many Catholics also choose to attend Mass as part of their Ash Wednesday observance and during this liturgy ashes are distributed.

How are ashes used on Ash Wednesday?
Traditionally the ashes used on Ash Wednesday are made by burning the blessed palms from the previous year’s Palm Sunday. During the liturgy the priest will bless the ashes by saying prayers over them and sprinkling them with Holy Water. He will then invite the people forward to receive them. In English speaking countries, the ashes are usually traced in the Sign of the Cross on each person’s forehead. As the ash cross is being traced the priest (or ash minister) will say either, “Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return,” or “Repent and believe in the Gospel.”

What is the meaning of the ashes?
Ashes have long been a symbol of grief and penance. There are numerous biblical passages where people sit in ashes, cover themselves in ash, etc. as a demonstration of repentance. Lent is a season focused acknowledging sin and trying to be better. By wearing ashes on Ash Wednesday, the faithful show both their sorrow and remorse for having sinned and separated themselves from God in days past and their willingness and commitment to living a more Christian life in the days to come. Finally, many Catholics view the receiving of ashes and wearing them for the remainder of the day as a chance to be more public about their faith and evangelize. People unfamiliar with this particular Christian practice may ask about the ashes which can be a great opportunity to have a conversation about the faith. A variety of responses would be appropriate when asked about the ashes but perhaps the simplest is to say, “The ashes mean that I am a sinner, but they are in the shape of a cross because I have a savior.”
Ash Wednesday Reflection

Family Last Name: _____________________________

First Names of Adult Participants: ___________ ___________

First Names of Youth Participants: ______________

What is the one thing that stuck out for you during this liturgy?

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What is one way that your family can put more focus on God this Lenten season?

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Did Ash Wednesday help you to connect with God and/or our parish community?
If yes, how? If not, why not?

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What is one thing about Ash Wednesday Mass that you would like to share with others?

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