

Ash Wednesday



Today is the beginning of the season of Lent. It is 40 days of repentance and renewal for us in the Church. Yesterday, some of you came to church to begin that repentance by making your Confession, one of the 7 Sacraments of the Church. In effect, you were cleaning up your life before beginning a time of renewal—one in which you were determined to walk more closely with Jesus your Lord and Saviour.

Lent is a time to get right with God. Of course, this should be something we are determined to do all the time—but it is helpful to do it all together—to help each other in the renewal of our lives, so that by helping each other, we may together draw closer to our destiny to become the Saints of God. To symbolize our dedication to this renewal, each of us at this service will be anointed with Ashes on our foreheads, in the sign of the cross.

Those Ashes actually come from the Palm Branches that we blessed last Palm Sunday—they were burned yesterday and ground into fine ashes—and today used to inscribe the Sign of the Cross on each of us, as was done at our Baptism with Holy Oil. It is from that action that we get the name of today—Ash Wednesday—the beginning of our time of renewal.

So, what can we do during these 40 days?

First, we Refocus our Christian Lives. Since last Easter, which we celebrated the Resurrection of Jesus with great joy—our lives have been slipping into petty sins, our enthusiasm for the Love of God has been fading, and we have been neglecting those things that would build the Kingdom of God where we live. So Lent is a time to Refocus on Jesus—to put aside those actions that have been taking us away from Him—to work together to help each other walk more closely with Him. To do that, the Church will invite you to join each Wednesday through Lent on walking the Stations of the Cross. This is a simple service that allows us to walk with Jesus as He carried His cross from the place of Judgement to Calvary, and from there to the Tomb. We learn how to live by watching Him die. The Stations of the Cross concentrate our attention strictly on Jesus. We see what our salvation cost—we pray with St Mary His Mother, St. John, and all the others at the foot of the Cross. No one can walk the Stations without being inwardly moved to repentance, and gratitude.

Second, we Repent of our sins. During the 40 days of Lent, we examine ourselves to see what in our lives has been drawing us away from Jesus. And when we find it out, we determine to no longer engage in those actions. Some of you may want to make a Sacramental Confession again during Lent, discovering what needs to be changed, telling the Lord about it, and receiving His total forgiveness. But all of us will want to spend time

searching our lives to find things that need changing. Actions that are keeping you from being the Christian that you want to be—the Christian that God wants you to be. There will be a Confession and Absolution in every Eucharist—without fail. And we will allow you time to quietly tell the Lord of which sins you are ashamed and need to be forgiven. It is a time of spiritual housecleaning, and well worth doing.

Third, Lent is a time of Renewal. Some of you will want to attend the Lenten Program of Study. During this time, in the Parish Hall, we will together study a book on the Faith, designed to teach us how to be better Christians. Sometimes it is a book on Prayer, sometimes it is a book on Growing in Christ, sometimes it is a book on the Teaching of the Church. Always it is a time of study, of sharing with each other, of expanding out horizons so that we can emerge at Easter as more enthusiastic and more knowledgeable Christians. Walking with Jesus can be difficult—building His Kingdom in the world around us can be even more difficult. Take advantage of the Lenten Program of Study.

For others, you will want to renew your attendance at a Home Bible Study. There are a number going on right now in the parish, and you are all invited to attend any one that suits you best. They are listed on the back of the Bulletin, with the dates, times, and places. Choose one, pick up your Bible, and join. It's as simple as that—you'll be glad you did.

Others still will choose a book from the Church Library and pledge yourself to read it all through Lent. To make the best of that, you need to set aside a time of study each day—a time when you can be quiet to let the Lord speak to you quietly. And if you do, He will.

Finally, pray for this parish, for your friends here, for the Church Committee, and for your priest. Your prayers will make everything go right. Your daily prayers will strengthen not only you, but also all of us. Make this Lent a time of personal renewal, so that when Easter comes, you can shout Alleluia with Joy and Faith.

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