

# Lent: March 5th

## Ash Wednesday

### *Old Calendar: Ash Wednesday*

The time has now come in the Church year for the solemn observance of the great central act of history, the redemption of the human race by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In the Roman Rite, the beginning of the forty days of penance is marked with the austere symbol of ashes which is used in today's liturgy. The use of ashes is a survival from an ancient rite according to which converted sinners submitted themselves to canonical penance. The Alleluia and the Gloria are suppressed until Easter. Abstinence from eating meat is to be observed on all Fridays during Lent. This applies to all persons 14 and older. The law of fasting on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday applies to all Catholics from age 18 through age 59.

### **Ash Wednesday**

At the beginning of Lent, on Ash Wednesday, ashes are blessed during Mass, after the homily. The blessed ashes are then "imposed" on the faithful as a sign of conversion, penance, fasting and human mortality. The ashes are blessed at least during the first Mass of the day, but they may also be imposed during all the Masses of the day, after the homily, and even outside the time of Mass to meet the needs of the faithful. Priests or deacons normally impart this sacramental, but instituted acolytes, other extraordinary ministers or designated lay people may be delegated to impart ashes, if the bishop judges that this is necessary. The ashes are made from the palms used at the previous Passion Sunday ceremonies. — *Ceremonies of the Liturgical Year*, Msgr. Peter J. Elliott

The act of putting on ashes symbolizes fragility and mortality, and the need to be redeemed by the mercy of God. Far from being a merely external act, the Church has retained the use of ashes to symbolize that attitude of internal penance to which all the baptized are called during Lent. — *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy*

From the very early times the commemoration of the approach of Christ's passion and death was observed by a period of self-denial. St. Athanasius in the year 339 enjoined upon the people of Alexandria the 40 days' fast he saw practiced in Rome and elsewhere, "to the end that while all the world is fasting, we who are in Egypt should not become a laughing stock as the only people who do not fast but take our pleasure in those days." On Ash Wednesday in the early days, the Pope went barefoot to St. Sabina's in Rome "to begin with holy fasts the exercises of Christian warfare, that as we do battle with the spirits of evil, we may be protected by the help of self-denial." — *Daily Missal of the Mystical Body*

### **Things to Do:**

Participate in Ash Wednesday at your parish. Let them remain on your forehead as a witness to your faith. If you have children, you may want to share this information with them in terms that they can understand. Today, parents should encourage their children to reflect upon what regular penances they will perform throughout this season of Lent. Ideally, each member of the family should choose his own personal penance as well as some good acts to practice all during Lent, e.g. daily spiritual reading, daily Mass, extra prayers, almsgiving, volunteer work, helping where you won't have normally gone before, read a good book on your Catholic Faith, such as "This is the Faith", by Fr. Cannon Ripley. The whole family may consider giving up one thing together (TV, movies, desserts), better yet begin doing the family rosary, Holy Hour, Stations of the Cross and be sure to explain things to your children in a manner they can understand.

You might even consider the original tradition of giving up meat for meals all during Lent. The family can each contribute new menu ideas to share in the sacrifice, plus there may be great health benefits to the practice.