



Ash Wednesday

A Quick Guide

by Jessica Rinaudo

Ash Wednesday officially kicks off the Lenten season in the Church, a season dedicated to prayer, fasting and penance. It takes place 46 days before Easter. This year, that day is Wednesday, March 6th.

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HISTORY

Ash Wednesday became a practice of the Catholic Church when it was accepted at the Council of Nicea in 325 AD. This is also when the 40-day period of fasting for Lent was established. In 601, Pope Gregory moved the beginning of Lent to Ash Wednesday, 46 days before Easter, and also began the tradition of marking foreheads with ashes in the shape of the cross.



2

SYMBOLISM

The ashes used on Ash Wednesday are a combination of the remnants of the palms from Palm Sunday from the previous year and holy water. When the priest says, “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return,” before marking the heads of the faithful with ash, he reminds us of our own mortality and calls us to repent.

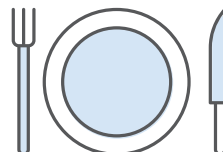


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FASTING

Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are obligatory days of fasting and abstinence for Catholics. In addition, Fridays during Lent are obligatory days of abstinence.

For members of the Catholic Church, the norms on fasting are obligatory from age 18 until age 59. When fasting, a person is permitted to eat one full meal, as well as two smaller meals that together are not equal to a full meal. *(from the USCCB)*



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WHO CAN RECEIVE ASHES?

Receiving ashes on Ash Wednesday is not a Sacrament, but a sacramental, which means all believers, not just Catholics, are welcome to receive ashes. They are intended to bring the faithful closer to God.

