

# Ash Wednesday

By: James Castruccio – 2/14/2024

## ***Why is Ash Wednesday important to me and why do I celebrate it?***

Ash Wednesday is the beginning of the Lenten Season in the Liturgical Calendar and carries significant meaning as Christians turn our hearts towards God in repentance and prayer. The symbolism of Ash Wednesday and Lent is remembering our mortality, need for salvation, and the period of temptation and testing that Jesus faced in the desert.

The name "Ash Wednesday" is derived from placing ashes on believers' foreheads in the shape of a cross often accompanied by the words "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return," emphasizing mortality and the need for repentance.

The ashes are meant to remind Christians about human mortality, while also showing our desire for repentance and mourning of our own sins. They are a mixture of ashes, Holy Water and, sometimes, olive oil. The ashes come from the palms used in the previous year's Palm Sunday.

We typically hear of people giving something up for Lent, fasting from something. Backing up a few days, Mardi Gras is timed to be the weekend prior to Ash Wednesday and culminating on "Fat Tuesday" where many people overindulge in that which they are going to fast from. This is not the intention of Lent, nor does it provide a humble entrance into the season, in my opinion.

Now, back to fasting during Lent. I need to ask the Lord to search my heart and reveal those things I need to repent of and for His strength to turn from anything I have put above Him. This can be a difficult prayer of self-reflection and revelation, but it is necessary. Is there something I revere more than my Savior? Are there any idols in my life that I need to remove? While I need to do this daily, Lent is a season that reminds me to be more intentional about it.

As I set my eyes toward Easter and the victory Christ had over death on the cross, I take this season to quiet the noise of the world and myself, to be sure my heart is set on my savior. How can I quiet the noise? One way is to fast. What have I put above the Lord? It should not be something that is easy for me to give up for a couple of months; a daily cappuccino, chocolate, etc. It needs to be something that I will really feel when I give it up. What is the intention of giving something up? Simply put, it is to put the Lord back in His place over that thing I am fasting from. I need to consider the time I spend with what I am giving up and instead spend that time with the Lord in prayer and meditation.

While it is good to share with others close to me what I am fasting from in order to invite them in to hold me accountable, fasting is private and should not be about telling the world that I am fasting from "such-and-such".

### ***Matthew 6:16-18***

<sup>16</sup> "When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. <sup>17</sup> But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, <sup>18</sup> so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Whether we are looking to grow closer to God through prayer and moments of reflective meditation or want to observe Lent by fasting from certain foods or habits like social media, the important thing is using the time recommit our need of a Savior.

Here are a few verses specific to Ash Wednesday to meditate and reflect on, and then a prayer you can pray to observe the day.

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## ***Our Creation: Genesis 2:7***

<sup>7</sup> Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

## ***Our Curse: Genesis 3:19***

<sup>19</sup> By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”

## ***Our Cry of Repentance: Psalm 51:7- 10***

<sup>7</sup> Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. <sup>8</sup> Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. <sup>9</sup> Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. <sup>10</sup> Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

## ***Challenge***

How will I approach Ash Wednesday? How will I approach the Lenten Season? Are there any things in my life that have become idols? I need to spend time in prayer and ask the Lord to reveal any idols to me. Am I willing to give up anything and replace it with time with the Lord as I prepare my heart for Easter?

## ***Prayer***

Heavenly Father, thank you for this Lenten season as we approach Easter and your glorious work on the cross. I confess that I have placed things above you, and I ask you to reveal to me anything that has become an idol so that, by Your strength and Your grace, I can remove it from Your position. I am truly sorry for allowing things to have a higher priority in my life than You, and I humbly repent. Please open my eyes to what I can abstain from during this Lenten season so I can turn that time back to you. Please let any change in me this season carry on throughout the year and remain in my life. In Jesus' name, Amen.