

Liturgical Living: Ash Wednesday

Lenten Fasting & Abstinence for Catholics
WHEN: Ash Wednesday & Good Friday = Fasting & Abstinence Every Friday = Abstinence
WHO: Catholics 14+ practice abstinence Catholics 18-59 practice fasting
WHAT IS FASTING? One full meal & two smaller meals ≠ full meal
WHAT IS ABSTINENCE? No meat

While not an actual holy day of obligation, Ash Wednesday is one of the most important holy days in the liturgical calendar. It takes place 46 days before Easter Sunday, and marks the beginning of the season of Lent.

The ashes are made from blessed palm branches, taken from the previous year's Palm Sunday Mass. The ashes symbolize the dust from which God made us.

As the priest applies the ashes to a person's forehead, he speaks the words: "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

Alternatively, the priest may speak the words, "Repent and believe in the Gospel."

Ashes also symbolize grief; in this case, grief that we have sinned and caused division from God. Today, read aloud the story of Jonah and the city of Nineveh (Jonah 3:1-10). Ask your children, "What were the signs that the people of Nineveh used to show their repentance?"

Ash Wednesday is a day of penitential prayer, fasting and abstinence from meat. The pictured chart is a good reminder of the fasting and abstinence rules for Lent.

Staying quietly busy on a solemn day can be hard for children. Consider quiet reading, whether Bible stories or a family read aloud. Try an art or craft project. Listen to a Catholic podcast. You may also want to sign up for the children's daily Lent reflection on the Hallow app.

Check next week's bulletin to learn more about the three pillars of Lent – Prayer, Fasting, and Almsgiving – and how to practice these with children.

"Lent is a time of grace, a time for conversion, a time to come home to God."

~ St. Maximilian Kolbe