

2026_02_18 Homily

Ash Wednesday

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/021826.cfm>

Jesus himself sets the tune for the next forty days: Prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. My brothers and sisters: The symbolism of Ashes that we will receive on our foreheads is beautiful and deep. In each Mass, we are always called to put all our injustice, sin, blood and guilt on the altar, and to let God deal with it. We offer our lives to a God who loves us and forgives the worst in us. Only when we know how gracious God is can we be honest about our sin without fear.

Today we acknowledge our sinful nature with ashes on our foreheads. We also know that God loves, forgives and embraces sinners. In the Gospel Jesus instructs that when we fast, we are not to show sad faces and make a big deal of our sad repentance. We are rather to prepare ourselves as if for a party. And the party takes place on Holy Saturday, when we will receive Holy Water on our foreheads. If we accept the call to repent and believe in the Gospel, the power of the Risen Lord will remove the stains of our sins from our souls. Holy Water is a symbol of that divine power. Let's give thanks today, because the God whom we presumed to be unwilling to do business with sinners such as us, has embraced us, forgiven us, even died for us sinners, only sinners.

During the next forty days, we give alms, we pray and we fast, not because we want to look good before God's eyes, or because we want to become worthy of his saving love. We give alms to support our church and the poor, we pray that we may always be as merciful as God is, and we fast, because we want to share our table with the hungry, with the immigrant and with the forgotten. It is through actions of justice, mercy, and inclusiveness, that we express our love for God. The spiritual journey that we begin today ends on the evening of Holy Saturday during the Easter Vigil, when we will receive the baptismal water on our heads, and our sinful nature will be cleansed from the spots of our sins. May this season of Lent be a time to renew our commitment to respond to the unconditional love of God, by loving and caring for one another.

On Ash Wednesday, 2017, Pope Francis described this time of grace with the following words: "Lent is a time for saying no. No to "spiritual asphyxia" caused by indifference; No to "the toxic pollution of empty and meaningless words"; No to "a prayer that

soothes our conscience, an almsgiving that leaves us self-satisfied, a fasting that makes us feel good, no to all forms of exclusion." And Francis concluded his reflection reminding us that, "Lent is a time to start breathing again... the time to open our hearts to the breath of the One capable of turning our dust to humanity." "Repent, and believe in the Gospel."

The Universal Prayer
Wednesday, February 18, 2026
Ash Wednesday

Celebrant:

Signed with a cross of ash we turn to God in prayer.

1. May the Church, enter into the desert in company with Jesus, who overcame the forces of evil and dedicated himself to the will of his Father.

Lord, have mercy.

2. May each one of us find that 'secret place', where during this season of Lent, we can be alone with God in prayer.

Lord, have mercy.

3. May our fasting and other Lenten penances release us from earthly desires and make us more intent on goodness, justice and mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

4. May this season of Lent make American Catholics more sensitive to the sufferings of the world, so that we can work together for a just future for all people.

Lord, have mercy.

5. May all who follow Christ be ambassadors of his mercy so that all can experience God's salvation.

Lord, have mercy.

Celebrant:

Heavenly Father, have mercy upon us in your kindness and help us to grow in the image of Jesus Christ whom you sent among us as Saviour and Redeemer of the world, for he is Lord, for ever and ever.