

Each year, Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent and is always 46 days before Easter Sunday. Lent is a 40-day season (not counting Sundays) marked by repentance, fasting, reflection, and, ultimately celebration. The 40-day period represents Christ's time of temptation in the wilderness, where he fasted and where Satan tempted him.

Lent asks believers to set aside a time each year for similar fasting, marking an intentional season of focus on Christ's life, ministry, sacrifice, and resurrection.



Last year, these ashes looked much different. They were palm branches, waved to show happiness and joy. Long, long ago, people used ashes to show they were sad. Sometimes they rubbed them on their skin. Sometimes they rubbed them on their clothes.

The ashes were a sign to the world that the people who wore them were mourning someone who had died. Sometimes they were a sign of repentance. The ashes signified that something had changed, something was wrong, something needed to be made right again. It was a way of making people's grief and prayers public and a way to invite others to accompany them.

This is a day for all those things. It's a day for remembering, a time to make things right again, both in us and in the world. For the truth is that Lent can be a new beginning. In the psalm, we hear how God puts a new heart in us, and from this day forward, we are being invited to live wisely, to cherish the people and the world around us, to put things back into perspective, to treat the small things as they should be treated, as small things, and to remember what is ultimately most important.

We wear ashes to call us back to life, back from the deadened ways in which we do so much of our living, and back to a life that takes our lives, our time, and the people in our lives seriously and gratefully. Today, we are invited to live a good life, to stand for something, to take the time and listen for direction, and to walk with integrity. We do all those things because of our grounding in God.

In a moment, you will be invited to receive ashes as a sign of repentance and commitment to new life. In our hearts, may these ashes be for us a sign of humbleness, that we will walk the path of Jesus and follow the leading of God. They will also be a sign of repentance, that we will turn our lives toward the light of God, just like a plant turns its face to the sun. The ashes are our "Yes" to God and to life.

They will also be for us a sign of acceptance, that we might accept, with our whole hearts, God's grace and favour and, in response, show the love of God to our neighbours in generous and surprising ways.



SENDING FORTH

Anyone in Christ becomes a new person altogether,
The past is finished and gone,
Everything becomes fresh and new.

**Glory to God, whose power is working in us
Can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine!
Glory be to God from generation to generation
In the world, in the church, and in our lives!**