

Ash Wednesday Prayers & Thoughts



Jesus, you place on my forehead
the sign of my sister Death:
"Remember you are dust,
and to dust you shall return."

How not hear her wise advice?
One day my life on earth will end;
the limits on my years are set,
though I know not the day or hour.
Shall I be ready to go to meet you?
Let this holy season be a time of grace
for me and all this world.

"Teach us to number our days aright,
that we may gain wisdom of heart."

O Jesus, you place on my forehead
the sign of your saving Cross:
"Turn from sin and be faithful
to the gospel."

How can I turn from sin
unless I turn to you?

You speak, you raise your hand,
you touch my mind and call my name,
"Turn to the Lord your God again."

These days of your favour
leave a blessing as you pass
on me and all your people.
Turn to us, Lord God,
and we shall turn to you.

As long as I can remember, Lent always seemed to be about rules,
rules and more rules to me. *What's so spiritual about following a
bunch of rules?* I often wondered.

The truth is, I now understand, Lent is about much more than rules.
How many times in your life have you thought, *If only I could
change things/do things differently?* Well, that's where Lent can
help. Ash Wednesday serves as our wake-up call at the beginning
of Lent. It is a time to identify the things we have done wrong or
wish we could change or do differently. Then we can choose to do
something about them during the next 40 days of Lent.

And what about those rules such as abstinence and fasting? Those
serve as gentle reminders to stay the course.

Lent is a journey, beginning on Ash Wednesday. Here are some
ideas to help you and your family along the way:

- Try to attend Ash Wednesday services together as a family. Most parishes offer evening Masses to help accommodate working parents and busy families.
- Attend a penance service at your parish. Going to confession provides a wonderful opportunity for a fresh start spiritually. Plus, if your kids see you partaking in the sacrament, they'll be more likely to go themselves.
- Focus on the meaning behind your fasting and abstinence. For instance, if having a particular food is a special treat for your family, the point of why you are abstaining from meat is probably lost. Try to find another meatless alternative for dinner.
- Collect the palm branches you received last year on Palm Sunday, gather your family together and burn the palms. Hold a family prayer service with the ashes. When you are done, do not throw out the excess ashes, but rather bury them in your garden. If you don't feel comfortable conducting such a ritual yourself, check with your parish to see if it is collecting last year's palm branches.
- Since Ash Wednesday is a reminder of the need for spiritual renewal and change in our lives, take some time to review your life and name those areas where you need renewal. Once you have identified these areas, identify ways to make a change.

A prayer for Ash Wednesday, from Henri Nouwen:

"O Lord, how often have I lived through Lent without paying much attention? But how can I ever really celebrate Easter without observing Lent? How can I rejoice fully in your resurrection when I have avoided participating in your death?"

There is so much in me that needs to die: false attachments, anger and greed, impatience and stinginess. O Lord, I am self-centred, concerned about myself, my career, my future, my name... Often I even feel that I try to use you for my own advantage. How preposterous, how sad! But yes, Lord, I know it is true. O Lord, make this Lenten season different from the other ones. Let me find you again. Amen."

REPENT AND BELIEVE THE GOOD NEWS