

Homily ~ Ash Wednesday, 2026

Today, as we begin the holy season of Lent, the Church invites us into a sacred moment: **Ash Wednesday**. The Gospel we have just heard from Gospel of Matthew (Mt 6:1–6, 16–18) sets the tone for these forty days.

In the First Reading, the prophet Joel cries out: “Return to me with your whole heart.” Not just with words, not just with external signs not even with partial heart but with the whole heart. The Responsorial Psalm 51, gives us the prayer of a repentant sinner: “Create in me a clean heart, O God.” And Saint Paul urges us, “Be reconciled to God.”

Ash Wednesday - *dies cinerum*, the Day of Ashes - is like the Church’s Day of Atonement. In the Old Testament, people expressed repentance in sackcloth and ashes. Even the people of Nineveh repented in this way. Today, we receive ashes on our foreheads, made from the palms of last year’s Palm Sunday. As the priest or the delegates traces the sign of the cross, he says: “Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return,” or “Repent and believe in the Gospel.”

These words are not meant to frighten us, but to awaken us.

The ashes remind us of three powerful truths. First, we are mortal. Our life on earth is short and unpredictable. Second, sin is serious. If we refuse to turn back to God, we risk losing the very purpose of our lives. Third, and most important, God is merciful. The ashes are not a sign of despair; they are a sign of hope. They are an invitation to come home, like the prodigal son, to a Father who is loving and forgiving.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus speaks about prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. But He warns us: do not perform them to be seen by others. Lent is not about appearances. It is about authenticity. It is about a heart-to-heart relationship with God.

We fast, not just from food, but from sin. We fast from anger, gossip, selfishness, and unhealthy habits. Fasting reduces what we might call our “spiritual obesity” - the build-up of bad tendencies and addictions that weigh down our souls. It gives us clarity of mind and strength of will. It frees time and resources so that we can pray more deeply and share more generously with the needy.

We pray more intentionally, not as a routine, but as a conversation with God. We give alms, not from our surplus, but from a compassionate heart.

Dear Once, Lent is a journey of purification and renewal. It is a time to forgive and to ask for forgiveness. A time to be reconciled with God and with one another. A time to make a real change - to turn away from sin and make a right turn toward God.

As you come forward to receive the ashes, do not see them as a mere ritual. See them as a personal invitation from God: “Come back to Me. Let Me create in you a clean heart.”

May these forty days lead us to a deeper conversion, so that when we arrive at Easter, we may rise with Christ renewed in mind, heart, and spirit. Wish you all a fruitful Lent.