



Lent is a season of reflecting and of penance for us Catholics. It is a forty day journey that we make to prepare us for the glory of Easter. It is a solemn season in which we recall the events that led to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. During this liturgical season we are called to pray, reflect, penance, fast and almsgiving. You will also notice that the church will be decorated in a very simple manner. The church will almost look barren and the color purple will be very present during this season.

Ash Wednesday is the beginning of Lent. You might remember Ash Wednesday because on this day we literally get ashes on our foreheads. These ashes are a symbolic reminder of the solemnity of the season and how we are to repent of our sins so that we may prepare to fully rejoice in the glory of the Resurrection on Easter.

1. **Why do we get ashes on our forehead?** The ashes we receive on our forehead are a reminder of the penance we are going to do during Lent. In the Old Testament it mentions how people doing penance would wear a sackcloth and cover themselves with ashes. This would be a visible sign that they repented and wanted to change. The ashes are also a visible reminder to all who see it that we also want to repent of our sins and change so that we may grow closer to God, which is also the purpose of Lent.
2. **Why does Lent last forty days?** In the bible, the number forty is used several times. Noah and his family are kept afloat in the boat he build for forty days and forty nights. The Israelites wander in the desert for forty years after fleeing Egypt. Jesus spent forty days and forty nights in the desert preparing before he started his public ministry. These time frames of forty years or forty days would be periods of great trials and difficulties, times of searching, reflection, and action in our faith history. We too are called to reflect, search, and take action so that we may change our ways for the better and grow in our faith.
3. **Why do we give things up during Lent?** Lent is a time of renewing in spirit. One way of doing this is by giving something up. Giving something up helps us to learn to appreciate what we have and also grow in our desire to be closer to God. Doing a sacrifice and giving something up also helps us think of others and their needs. Some people decide to do something extra instead of giving something up, like praying a rosary or helping a neighbor. It is all about taking the time to grow closer to God during this time of reflection.

This Lenten season we are going to reflect on the missionary heart that God gave all of us. We are called to love, serve, share, help, and care for one another by putting our missionary heart to use. We love because God loves us so much, he sent his only son to give us eternal life. We serve because of the example set by Jesus to serve others and not be served, which teaches us humility. We share what we have because God calls us to live in community as the Body of Christ, as brothers and sisters. We help because as the good Samaritan, we extend a helping hand to those who might need it without looking to see who they are. Finally, we care for one another as children of God.

# Ash Wednesday

Prayer Service (February 14)

All Grades

*Prepare the prayer space. Beforehand, weave a purple ribbon around a grapevine wreath, gather three large nails and a purple or white candle. The color purple represents the season of Lent, the wreath and nails symbolize Christ's crucifixion, the light of the candle represents the light of Christ in the world. Place these items somewhere in your classroom to be used to pray during the season of Lent.*

**Leader:** Dear Jesus, open our minds and hearts that we may hear and follow your word.

*A reading from the Prophet Daniel 9:3-5, 17, 18*

Then, to show my sorrow, I went without eating and dressed in sackcloth and sat in ashes. I confessed my sins and earnestly prayed to the Lord my God: "Our Lord, you are a great and fearsome God, and you faithfully keep your agreement with those who love and obey you. But we have sinned terribly by rebelling against you and rejecting your laws and teachings... I am your servant, Lord God, and I beg you to answer my prayers... Please show mercy to your chosen city, not because we deserve it, but because of your great kindness."

*(Allow for one of two minutes of silence for the students to reflect.)*

## Prayer:

Dear Jesus,  
today is Ash Wednesday,  
the first day of Lent.

It is the beginning  
of our forty-day journey  
to Easter with you.

Please help us to turn away from sin.  
Heal our weakness and make us true friends  
of God.

May our sacrifices, prayers,  
and kindness to others  
bring us closer to you each day.

May the ashes we receive today  
be an outward sign of our faith  
and our love for you.

Amen.



## FUN FACT

Where do the ashes come from?

The ashes come from the burning of the palms from previous year's Palm Sunday.