

Ash Wednesday, February 17

Joel 2:1-2, 12-17 | Psalm 103 | 2 Corinthians 5:20-6:10 | Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

What is Ash Wednesday?

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of the forty days of Lent, a season of repentance, fasting, and self-reflection, patterned after Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. Ash Wednesday is the day in which Christians gather to receive the imposition of ashes, which have signified repentance from biblical times. They remind us that we live in a mortal world, that we are made from dust, and will return to our maker. All of this happens with the sure knowledge of God's love and grace to us through Christ.

Collect for Ash Wednesday

Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing you have made, and you forgive the sins of all who are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Week One, February 21-27

Genesis 9:8-17 | Psalm 25 | 1 Peter 3:18-22 | Mark 1:9-13

What is Lent?

Lent is a yearly journey of repentance which reminds us, humbles us, and takes us back to the foot of the cross. It doesn't do this to condemn us. We repent to be free, to be honest with God, and to be enabled to accept his forgiveness one more time. Lent is not about reminding God that he should forgive us. It's about reminding us that we worship a God who loved us enough to take away our sins, and who always will. We can't repent unless we are already assured of his love and grace.

First Sunday in Lent

Almighty God, whose blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan: Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations, and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Week Two, February 28 - March 6

Genesis 22:1-14 | Psalm 16 | Romans 8:31-39 | Mark 8:31-38

Why do we practice Lenten disciplines?

In Lent we take up fasts and disciplines of prayer to be better able to listen to the Holy Spirit, to see ourselves as we are, to know our own weaknesses, and to observe our temptations. As we do so, we pray for God to reveal his grace to us in a deeper way. We don't take on these disciplines to prove that we are righteous people. They aren't a tool for healing, but for diagnosis: Lenten disciplines don't take too long to reveal something to us, and when they do we should rest in the knowledge of God's love and grace.

Second Sunday in Lent

Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities that may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts that may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Week Three, March 7-13

Exodus 20:1-21 | Psalm 19:7-14 | Romans 7:12-25 | John 2:13-22

Why should I fast during Lent?

It is biblical, it has been recommended by our mothers and fathers in faith, and it is accessible to everyone at some level. Remember, however, that a fast is not the focus of Lent. The future feast is the focus, and fasting is a way to prepare for that feast. During Lent, we fast to prepare for Easter, a parallel to our lives of waiting for Christ's return.

Third Sunday in Lent

Heavenly Father, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you: Look with compassion upon the heartfelt desires of your servants, and purify our disordered affections, that we may behold your eternal glory in the face of Christ Jesus; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Week Four, March 14-20

2 Chronicles 36:14-23 | Psalm 122 | Ephesians 2:1-10 | John 6:1-15

How should I fast during Lent?

There is a difference between fasting and abstaining. Most churches see fasting as eating only one small meal in a day (for older teens and adults). Abstaining is usually giving up meat or something else. It is traditional to fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, and to practice abstinence on Fridays. The Sunday feasts in Lent are mini-Easters, celebrations of Christ's resurrection on the Lord's Day, so they are times to celebrate, to enjoy life, food, and fellowship. They are not moments of guilty indulgence; instead they are a glimpse into the future life we are assured of in Christ.

Fourth Sunday in Lent

Gracious Father, whose blessed Son Jesus Christ came down from heaven to be the true bread which gives life to the world: Evermore give us this bread, that he may live in us, and we in him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Week Five, March 21-27

Jeremiah 31:31-34 | Psalm 51 | Hebrews 5:1-10 | John 12:20-33

What should I "give up" during Lent?

Give up something reasonable and that you will notice – and that is normally good for you – and reflect and pray about the experience in missing it. Our fast reminds us what hunger and need feel like, so that when we feast we will know that it is God who fills us up. Also give away your time, money, or resources to serve others sacrificially.

Fifth Sunday in Lent

Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of this world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.