

History of Lent



For many Christians around the world, Ash Wednesday is the opening of the season of Lent. Lent is the dedication of 40 days to interior preparation for the great feast of Easter. "Lent" comes from the root word for spring. As spring is a season of new life and symbolizes hope, so Lent is a season of personal renewal and rededication. The 40 day span of time recalls the 40 years the Hebrew people spent in hope of finding the Promised land. It also recalls the 40 days Jesus spent in preparation for his public ministry. Some Christians choose to mark their foreheads with ashes today as an external symbol of their commitment to personal renewal. The ashes used, come from the burning of palms from the previous year's Palm Sunday. Ashes are a traditional symbol of human frailty and repentance. "Re-pentance" is simply the concept of re-thinking priorities.

Some Christians practice the tradition of "giving something up for lent." In days gone by, Lent was almost a time of "spiritual Olympics" – competing with one another for who could give up the most. A more contemporary view of Lent is that what goes on internally is much more important than any external show of piety. It is the hope that whatever method of re-arranging personal priorities is used, by the end of 40 intentional days of reflection and renewal, a new person will emerge who has chosen to live in a more just and loving way.

For some home-bound patients and families, Ash Wednesday may be a day of spiritual nostalgia, sacred memories and a possible opening to conversations that matter. Whatever your beliefs, today is an invitation to notice the gift of time and the opportunity to change for the better.

