

LENT

prayer • fasting • almsgiving

Every year on Ash Wednesday, we make a dramatic gesture that is unlike anything else we do at Mass. We smear our faces with ashes. What we are doing is crossing out the masks that we wear. Although this year we will sprinkle ashes on your head. We are saying that there is more to us than the roles we play. There is more to us than we are showing. By smearing ashes on our faces, we are saying that we will die one day. We came from ashes and we are returning to ashes. We are not immortal. We are not invincible. Our lives are short and most of us will be forgotten shortly after we die.

We are also proclaiming to the world that we are sinners in need of repentance. For all of our efforts to follow Jesus and to lead a good life, we have fallen short. We are taking off our masks of independence, of self-assuredness, of perfection and telling the world that we need to change. Ash Wednesday is an invitation to us to stop playing a role and to stand before God as we really are - sinners who will one day die and who are in need of the forgiveness and the eternal life that only God can give us.

We Fast on Ash Wednesday as well as on Good Friday. We fast not having meat on Friday's during lent. Fasting during lent un.masks all the ways we try to fill ourselves up with things that can never really satisfy us. Even while it weakens our body, fasting strengthens our soul to face up to ourselves as we really are and turn to Jesus for the help we need.

Another way that we can discover our authentic selves during Lent is by sharing what we have with the poor. Traditionally, Christians have taken the money they have saved by eating less and sacrificing more and shared it with the needy. This practice reminds us that the things of this world are passing away. It is a way of unmasking all the ways that we put our security and hope in material things. Being generous with the poor reminds us that we have a responsibility to love our neighbors and to serve them in their needs.

This Ash Wednesday is an invitation to stop being an impostor, to take off the masks we've been wearing, and to stop making believe we are something we are not. Chances are, we are not fooling anyone anyway, and we certainly are not fooling God.

As we receive ashes on Ash Wednesday, let us ask God to give us the courage to dissolve our fake, insincere self and discover the true self He created us to be. Then He can begin to heal and transform us as we make our journey to the celebration of Easter.

I invite you to find some time during this Lenten season to pray and stay closer to Jesus. May Lord bless you during this Lenten journey.

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