

Ash Wednesday is a holy day that signifies the beginning of Lent. It marks the entry into a season of spiritual preparation for Holy Week, which culminates in Easter. Any march toward the redeeming work of Christ must begin with a recognition of our need for his grace—and that reminder is Ash Wednesday. The day affirms that we are dust, as ashes are literally spread in a cross on our foreheads. The cross represents Jesus and how he has liberated us from eternal death. We are encouraged to seek repentance with humble hearts and prepare for his gift. While Ash Wednesday isn't mentioned in the Bible, Scripture does testify to the practice of repenting in dust and ashes. The ashes for Ash Wednesday are typically provided by burning the palms from Palm Sunday of the year prior. Christians in the early church were sprinkled with ashes during Lent; however, it wasn't until the Middle Ages that the church began the Ash Wednesday practice of marking foreheads.

Merciful God, you called us forth from the dust of the earth; you claimed us for Christ in the waters of baptism. Look upon us as we enter these Forty Days bearing the mark of ashes, and bless the journey through the desert of Lent to the font of rebirth. As we remember our mortality and seek penitence today, we know you to be a God who is rich in forgiveness and abounding in steadfast love, love that culminates in eternal life with you. Guide our steps this Lent, so that we might find greater fulfillment in your promises and better serve others with a heart that's reflective of you. Amen.

Joel 2:1-2, 12-17

Psalm 51:1-17

Isaiah 58:1-12

2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Spend some time reflecting on the following questions:

- Do you need to ask someone to forgive you for what you did or said? So humbling, but necessary. Ask God for the courage.
- Whom do you need to forgive: yourself, others, or God? Let go and allow God to do justice, show love, grace, mercy, and forgiveness.
- What do you need to do differently in your life to be more productive to serve and honor God by your words, actions, and finances?
- Release each situation to Jesus through the connecting power of the Holy Spirit.
- Allow God to intervene on your behalf to solve each problem. Do NOT fear! Do NOT doubt, but trust God and be amazed at how each problem will be solved.
- During the Lenten season, ask Jesus for a plan to draw you closer to the Trinity? What barriers are between you and a fuller relationship with God? Pray for a plan to draw closer now.
- Are you watching too much television, video games, social media, etc.? Limit your time on these activities each day and spend more time reading the Bible, praying, and doing acts of kindness. Even one a day will alter your habits.
- Do you need to break a bad habit or addiction? Ask the Holy Spirit to empower you with wisdom, strength, and self-control to achieve victory while living the new habit. Read Scripture, call a friend, or get some exercise during the cravings.
- Maybe, Jesus is asking you to begin a new ministry, create a poem, write that novel you've been meaning to write. Compose a song. Develop an invention. Ask God for the inspiration and then lean into your creative heart.

Pray now and ask God to change your very ways of being in order to more faithfully be the creation that God intends for you to be.

Remember that you were created from dust of the earth, and to dust you shall return. Impose the ash on your forehead or the forehead of a loved one. Pastor Phil is also available to do this if you wish, just ask and he is more than happy to come be with you.

You are welcome to sit and pray as long as you like. God's lavish blessings be upon you, Beloved Friend.

