

# Ash Wednesday

by Kirby Will

Consultant Formation: Identity and Outreach

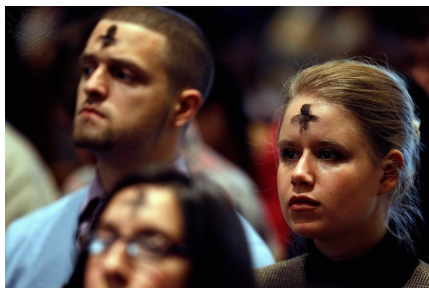


I acknowledge the First Nations Peoples as the first inhabitants of the nation and the traditional custodians of the lands where we live, learn and work. I pay my respects to the Elders past and present, for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture and hopes of First Peoples across the nation. I acknowledge the deep spiritual attachment and relationship of First Nations Peoples to this country and commit to an ongoing journey of Reconciliation.

## Context

### Ash Wednesday

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of the Lenten season; a time which is typically defined by prayer, fasting, and giving for Catholics. Lent is much more than a season that marks the passing of time in the Church, it is a key part to a believer's individual faith journey. Lent presents an opportunity for a focussed pilgrimage - for a journey closer into relationship with God through prayer, fasting, and giving. It is through these activities that participants can recalibrate their lives and deepen their encounter with God. Catholics, focused on this spiritual journey, do not expect to emerge from Lent the same as when they entered it. If they do, then perhaps there was a missed opportunity to reconnect in relationship with God. The Season of Lent is experienced every year, yet this does not mean it should always be the same. Believers have an opportunity to open their hearts and engage in a pilgrimage that invites them to ponder the 'Where am I going?' and 'How do I get there?' questions of their spiritual lives. John Paul Lichon invites Catholics to personally consider: *How does my journey through the world - my actions, movements, feelings, and dispositions - illuminate my Lenten journey to the Cross?*



Catholics Mark The Start Of Lent With Ash Wednesday Mass. Photography. Britannica ImageQuest, Encyclopædia Britannica, 25 May 2016. [quest.eb.com/images/115\\_3937613](https://quest.eb.com/images/115_3937613). Accessed 12 Feb 2024.

## Scripture

### Matthew 6:1-6.16 -18

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew

Your Father, who sees all that is one in secret, will reward you. Jesus said to his disciples: 'Be careful not to parade your good deeds before others to attract their notice; by doing this you will lose all reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give alms, do not have it trumpeted before you; that is what the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets to win other's admiration. I tell you solemnly, they have had their reward. But when you give alms, your left hand must not know what your right is doing; your almsgiving must be secret, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you. And when you pray, do not imitate the hypocrites: they love to say their prayers standing up in the synagogues and at the street corners for people to see them. I tell you solemnly, they have had their reward. But when you pray, go to your private room and, when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in that secret place, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you. When you fast do not put on a gloomy look as the hypocrites do: they pull long faces to let others know they are fasting. I tell you solemnly, they have had their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that no one will know that you are fasting except your Father who sees all that is done in secret; and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you.'

The Gospel of the Lord.

## Reflection

The Gospel today reminds Catholics that Jesus has little interest in religious practices that are done for the sake of ticking boxes, attracting attention, or 'placating' God. Instead, the message is that Lenten practices should be undertaken as a means to contribute to a spiritual pilgrimage, to deepen an experience of encounter with God. In his Lenten message for 2024, Pope Francis reminds us that, unlike Pharaoh, God does not want subjects, but sons and daughters. Christians believe God desires a relationship that moves beyond the transactional since God seeks to know each of us intimately. People of faith believe that religious rituals and spiritual practices can facilitate a personal relationship, or 'closeness' to God.

Prayer is one way that enables a connection with God, whilst fasting allows for the removal of distractions. In turn, 'entering fully' into prayer opens an experience for meaningful encounter with God. Almsgiving also offers opportunities for increased focus on God to consider how to give time, treasures, or talents in the service of God. There can be times when the practice of prayer, fasting and giving needs to be made known to others while undertaking them, yet it is important to remember that a personal relationship with God is at the heart of Lent, not the perception and acknowledgement of others.

The love between parent and child is not defined by how many people know about it, but by the quality of the interactions between the two. Similarly, the quality of interactions with God are key for the faithful. Moving away from distractions like pride and compliance through the Lenten season of prayer, fasting and giving, opens Catholics to an invitation of reflection for a journey through the world with humble hearts, in service and worship to God.

## Prayer

On Ash Wednesday, Catholics receive a cross of ashes on their foreheads to mark the beginning of Lent.

*May these ashes be a sign of sorrow.*

*Lent is a time of preparation.*

*Let us prepare our hearts, minds, and souls.*

*Lent is a time of commitment.*

*Let us commit ourselves to renewal.*

*Lent is a time of invitation.*

*Let us be attentive to God's invitation into relationship.*

*Lent is a time of examination.*

*Let us examine our conscience. Seriously.*

*Lent is a time of reflection.*

*Let us reflect on how we live love to Jesus, the poor and the forgotten.*

*Lent is a time of prayer.*

*Let us pray alone and pray together.*

*Gaul, M. (2024) Inspired by the Responsorial Psalm from 'A Time for Ashes: Ash Wednesday' in "Words for the Journey for Kids" (2010) Novalis Publishing Inc. Canada.*



Ash Wednesday celebration at Notre Dame du Travail Roman catholic church, Paris, France.. Photograph. Britannica ImageQuest, Encyclopædia Britannica, Nov 02 2020. [quest.eb.com/images/300\\_2789937](https://www.britannica.com/images/300_2789937). Accessed 12 Feb 2024.

## Call to Action

- Watch Matt Maher's [Ash Wednesday Breathing Through Lent](#) reflection.
- As a family choose some activities for Lent from this [list](#) that you could do together throughout the 40 days.
- Listen to Matt Maher's song based on Psalm 51: [Clean Heart](#)
- Pray this [Lenten examen](#) from Ignatian Spirituality.