

# Holiday Handout: Ash Wednesday

## February 17, 2021

### **What is Ash Wednesday?**

Ash Wednesday is one of the most popular and important holy days in the liturgical calendar. It marks the beginning of Lent, a 40-day season (not counting Sundays) of penance, reflection, fasting, and ultimately celebration, which prepares us for Christ's Resurrection on Easter Sunday, through which we attain redemption.

The 40-day season represents Christ's time of temptation in the wilderness, where he fasted and where Satan tempted him. Lent asks believers to set aside a time each year for similar fasting, marking an intentional season of focus on Christ's life, ministry, sacrifice and resurrection. The practice includes the wearing of ashes on the forehead, which symbolizes repentance and mourning for believers' sins.

### **When is Ash Wednesday celebrated?**

Ash Wednesday occurs every year and is always 46 days before Easter Sunday. This year, Ash Wednesday is celebrated on February 17, 2021.

### **How is Ash Wednesday Celebrated?**

During Mass (for Catholics) or worship service (for Protestants), the priest or pastor will usually share a penitential and reflective sermon. The mood is solemn – many services will have long periods of silence, and worshipers will often leave the service in silence.

Usually, there is a responsive passage of Scripture centered around confession, which is read aloud. Attendees will experience communal confession, as well as moments where they are prompted to silently confess sins and pray.

Afterward, the congregation will be invited to receive ashes on their foreheads. The priest or pastor will dip their finger into the ashes, spread them in a cross pattern on the forehead, and say, "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

### **Where do the Ashes Come From?**

Traditionally, ashes used on Ash Wednesday are gathered up after palms from the previous year's Palm Sunday (the Sunday before Easter) are burned. They are then blessed before being used in the ceremony.

Palms are used on Palm Sunday to symbolize Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem on the Sunday before his crucifixion. Residents of Jerusalem are said to have waved palm fronds to celebrate his arrival.

### **Who celebrates Ash Wednesday?**

Ash Wednesday is observed by individuals from various sectors of Christianity, including Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Lutherans and Methodists.

### **How is TriHealth Celebrating Ash Wednesday During the COVID-19 Pandemic?**

This year, Ash Wednesday celebrations may look a little different. Due to the COVID pandemic and providing team member safety, this year there are no in-person Ash Wednesday services at TriHealth, as

has been in the past. We do want to provide you links to local parishes' live streams to participate virtually in this sacred tradition, which begins the season known as Lent.

- St. Peter in Chains Cathedral, Archdiocese of Cincinnati Mass: [Live Stream at 7 a.m.](#)
- Bellarmine Chapel at Xavier University Mass: [Live Stream at 5 p.m.](#)
- Faith Community United Methodist Church Services: [Livestream & Facebook Live at 12, 5 and 7 p.m.](#)

TriHealth's chaplains have been creative to provide opportunities for team members to receive a touchless Ash Wednesday blessing to continue the traditional sacred symbol of the day. Click [here](#) for times and locations.

Sources:

<https://www.catholic.org/lent/ashwed.php>

[https://www.christianity.com/church/church-life/what-is-ash-wednesday-why-do-christians-celebrate-it.html#who\\_celebrates](https://www.christianity.com/church/church-life/what-is-ash-wednesday-why-do-christians-celebrate-it.html#who_celebrates)

<https://www.indystar.com/story/news/2019/03/05/ash-wednesday-why-christians-wear-ashes-fast-and-give-things-up/3054204002/>