

## Lent – FAQs

### What is Ash Wednesday?



Ash Wednesday marks the start of the season of Lent, which begins 40 days prior to Easter (Sundays are not included in the count). Lent is a time when many Christians prepare for Easter by observing a period of fasting, repentance, moderation and spiritual discipline. During Ash Wednesday services, the priest will lightly rub the sign of the cross with ashes onto the foreheads of worshipers.

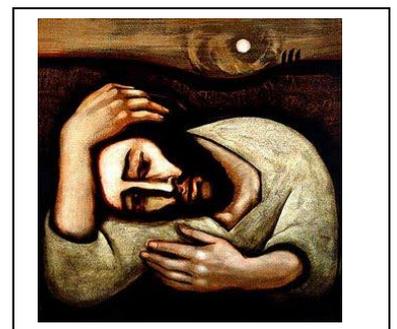
It is a very solemn service where we call to mind in a serious and penitential way the gravity of our sin. But it is not a depressing experience – it is a liberating experience, as we take our sin AND God's grace seriously.

Ash Wednesday is not mentioned in the Bible, but mourning and repenting (saying sorry to God and turning our life around) with sackcloth and ashes is referenced in the Old and New Testaments. (2 Samuel 13:19; Esther 4:1; Job 2:8; Daniel 9:3; and Matthew 11:21).

Not all Christian churches observe Ash Wednesday or Lent. They are mostly observed by Anglicans, Roman Catholics and the Lutheran, Methodist and Presbyterian denominations.

### What is Lent?

The period of 40 days preceding Easter, which is devoted to prayer, penitence, almsgiving and self-denial (which includes fasting), in commemoration of Christ's fasting in the wilderness and in preparation for Easter. In the Western Church it runs from Ash Wednesday to Holy Saturday, and so includes forty weekdays.



### Why should I bother?

Well, that's a good question. Every faith tradition has periods of self-denial, reflection, special prayer and devotion, penitence and almsgiving. Lent is the Christian one. But sadly in many people's book it is either forgotten or reduced to giving up tea, alcohol or chocolate. I think that's a great shame. Lent can be a really fruitful time to spiritually de-clutter and make some extra space for God. None of us give God enough time – we are always rushing from one thing to the next. If we abstain from something – and use that self-denial to create space, hunger, clarity – which we then focus on God... that can be a wonderful and powerful thing.



Too often,  
fasting becomes  
about changing  
what we do  
when it should  
be about  
changing who  
we are.

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It is not about hurting ourselves, it's about dragging ourselves away from a culture of gluttony and 'over-everything' and focussing in a simple, but concentrated way on God. Lent can kick-start a spiritual revolution in your soul and draw you closer to Jesus.

#### **What could I do?**

A million things. But here are few ideas. Try to make it realistic, but challenging. Involve your household, or go it alone. But make the 40 days count.

- 1) Be more still – decide you will light a candle and sit quietly in prayer for 5 minutes every day in Lent. Breathe deeply and steadily. You could repeat to yourself: “Jesus is the light of the world.” Or “Be still and know that I am God”
- 2) Be more alert – Intentionally notice nature around you – the trees, the catkins, the sky – note it, breathe it in and shoot an arrow prayer of thanks to God the Creator
- 3) Be more thankful – at the end of the day give thanks to God for 3 good things that happened that day, or three things you are grateful for in your life
- 4) Engage with Ash Wednesday
- 5) Join the Lent Course – “The Mystery of Everything” – based on the film “The theory of everything” (see details on the web/attached poster). Starts Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> March
- 6) Read a spiritual book
- 7) Sign up to one of the following to help you pray more (all can be found by googling them!):
  - a) Pray as you go
  - b) Richard Rohr's Meditation
  - c) Sacredspace.ie
- 8) Join one of the Lent movements online
  - a) [www.40acts.org.uk](http://www.40acts.org.uk) – 40 days of giving back, doing good and living generously
  - b) [www.christianaid.org](http://www.christianaid.org)
- 9) Think about the 4 disciplines of Lent – Prayer, Penitence, Almsgiving, Self-denial and work out a 'rule of life' where you will grow in each area over the next 40 days. It could be very simple:
  1. Prayer – I'm going to sit still for 5 minutes in God's presence every day during Lent
  2. Penitence – I'm going to repent about one negative, recurring sin e.g. anger and begin to pray about it and take steps to improve it
  3. Almsgiving – I'm going to give up my daily latte and give the money saved to Christian Aid
  4. Self-Denial – see earlier reference to my daily latte
- 10) Sit down for 30 minutes, pray, have a think, have a google and work out your own plan. Email it to us if you like and we'll share it on the web site [revsheridanjames@gmail.com](mailto:revsheridanjames@gmail.com).

# **Make Lent Matter**