



Why do Catholics put Ashes on our heads on Ash Wednesday?

by MARK HART

“Excuse me, you’ve got some dirt on your head.”

Every year someone says that to me on Ash Wednesday. Maybe it has happened to you too. In the past it used to frustrate me, but in recent years I have come to see it as a great opportunity to evangelize, to share with someone about the most important person in my life: Jesus Christ.

So, what do you say when folks ask you about that smudge on your forehead?

Here are a few responses that I would *not* recommend:

The Ignorant Response

‘My mom made me go to church and get them. I have no idea what they mean.’

The Sarcastic Response

‘I’m protesting showers. Today, ashes; tomorrow I’m going to swim in raw sewage.’

The Ridiculous Response

‘I have a big zit that I’m trying to cover up. Is it working?’

The Practical (but Misguided) Response

‘Better dirty on the outside of my head than on the inside.’

And here are a few responses that I *would* recommend:

The Biblical Response

Over forty passages in the Bible associate ashes with mourning and grief. In Old Testament times people used ashes as a sign of repentance. They would sit in ashes, roll around in them, sprinkle them upon their heads, or even mingle them with their food and drink. They did this as an outward sign of their inward posture of repentance. Check out **Daniel 9:3-6**, for an example.

Ash Wednesday begins Lent, a time when we stop and assess how we’re doing in our walk with God. Lent helps us identify spiritual areas in which we can grow and sinful areas that we need to avoid. To repent, put simply, means to turn *away* from sin and turn *toward* God. We use ashes as an outward expression of our need to begin again.

A Traditional Response

Ashes are a sign of physical death, as in 'ashes to ashes, dust to dust.' We began as dust (a joyless and lifeless existence), and our bodies will return to dust until we are raised up by Christ. By receiving ashes and keeping them on, we publicly proclaim our intent to die to our worldly desires and live even more in Christ's image, which we focus on during the season of 'rebirth' that is Lent (a Latin term for 'Spring').

The Historical Response

For over twelve hundred years on the *dies cinerum* (day of ashes) faithful followers have approached the altar and received ashes upon their foreheads. These ashes are made from the burnt palm fronds that were blessed on the Palm Sunday of the previous year. The ashes are sprinkled with holy water, usually fragranced with incense and blessed using four prayers that are thousands of years old.

The use of ashes for repentance and penance can be traced even further back and is practiced throughout the world. On Ash Wednesday ashes are applied to believers' foreheads in the shape of the cross.

The Symbolic Response

God formed Adam out of the 'dust' of the earth, which we read about in Genesis 2:7. In addition, Jesus healed the blind man with clay (earth and spit) in John 9:6. We mark ourselves with ashes as a 'new beginning' at the onset of Lent, allowing the life of Jesus Christ to make us whole and new again.

The Most Basic Response

I'm a sinner. I don't always love God as strongly as I could or as directly as I should. Ash Wednesday reminds me that it is only through God that I have life; He gave it to me.

Ash Wednesday also begins my preparation for Holy Week and the Passion and Resurrection of my Lord, Jesus, without Whom I have no life here and no chance at eternal life in Heaven. This is just a great opportunity for me to get better. Thanks for asking.

God forgives. He loves. And He gives this sinner a second chance. Put simply: my God kicks ash.

Taken, in part, from [Ask the Bible Geek 2: More Answers to Questions From Catholic Teens](#)

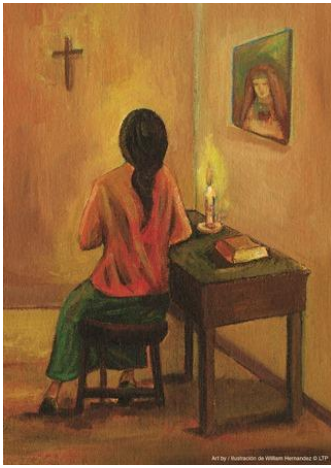
Here are some video links about Lent. These are great to watch with your children and your grandchildren:

<http://bustedhalo.com/video/watch-lent-3-minutes>

<http://bustedhalo.com/ministry-resources/25-great-things-you-can-do-for-lent>

<http://bustedhalo.com/video/ash-wednesday-in-two-minutes>

<http://bustedhalo.com/video/you-dont-know-jack-about-lent>



We are pleased to share some resources from Liturgy Training Publications that parishes may find helpful in celebrating each week in the seasons of Lent and Easter. They are presented in the form of a double-sided PDF handout that includes prayers, reflections on the daily readings, and suggestions for family activities. They are suitable for printing and distributing or including in the parish bulletin. You can also download the text-only Word documents from which you can copy and paste; just be sure to include the copyright credit.

Included this week is the following prayer for Ash Wednesday:

*In this Time
O God of mercy,*

*who is slow to anger and rich in kindness,
grant us, as we begin our Lenten journey,
contrite hearts that long for reconciliation
and steadfast spirits that proclaim your love.*

*In this acceptable time,
soften our calloused hearts,
watch over us and keep us from all sin.*

*In this season of repentance,
help us turn toward the light of your Son, Jesus Christ,
and away from selfish ambition.*

*In this period of renewal,
open our ears to hear your voice,
which calls us out of darkness,
so that with clean hearts we can forever proclaim your praise.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen*

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[Download the handout for Ash Wednesday](#)

[Text-only Word version](#)

[Download the handout for First Sunday of Lent](#)

[Text-only Word version](#)



HERE ARE JUST SOME OF THE UPCOMING EVENTS AT OLPH. PLEASE WATCH THE BULLETIN AND THE WEBSITE FOR MORE DETAILS AND MORE EVENTS.

February

FEB 16TH, 23RD, 30TH, MAR 2ND, 9TH, 16TH, 23RD -Parish Soup and Bread Lenten Series 2018

FEB 17th - Forgiven: The Transforming Power of Confession

FEB 18TH-Pancake Breakfast

FEB 20TH-Day of Confessions

March

MAR 12TH-14TH-Parish Lenten Mission

MAR 21st -Lenten Penitential

MAR 30th-GOOD FRIDAY

MAR 31st-EASTER VIGIL

April

APRIL 1st -EASTER SUNDAY

APRIL 3rd -MAY 15TH-33 Days to Morning Glory

APRIL 22nd -Pancake Breakfast

APRIL 30th – The Euthanasia Deception, 7:00 – 9:00 p.m.

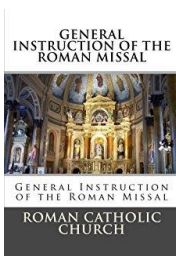
May

MAY 9TH-Cwl Fashion Show

MAY 13TH-Pancake Breakfast

June

JUNE 10TH-Parish Picnic



New Liturgy Protocols

Many of you still have questions about why there have been changes in some of the protocols during Mass. Why are the readers bowing? Why is the commentator bowing? Why is the Tabernacle moved? And what's with the change in how the communion ministers are doing things? How much time did it take Father Jim to think up all these things?

-Well, the short answer is Father Jim did not think up all these things. In November of 2011 a request from the Archbishop was made to implement changes in liturgy protocols. Some of these changes we had already made but there were still a few left to do. If you would like to know more about these changes, please go to www.olph.ca and look on the front. Scroll down and you will see under "Announcements" a category called "You asked...Father Jim responds". There you will find a link to the documents sent out by the Archdiocese. The second document is a summary of the changes that have been made. If you do not have access to a computer, you may pick up hard copies at the Parish office.



These protocols have added to the length of Mass. For those of you who take a taxi or have someone picking you up after Mass, it may be a good idea to add 15 minutes to the time you have set in the past. For example, a 6:15pm pick up for after the 5:00pm Masses, 9:45am for the 8:30am Masses and 11:45am for the 10:30am Masses.



Young Adult Ministry at OLPH! For Ages 18-35. All are Welcome! Don't go to our parish? Come anyway! We'd love to see you!

Check the Facebook page for more details:

<https://www.facebook.com/events/1053590118116472/>

Keep in touch:

www.olph.ca

<https://www.facebook.com/olphsherwoodpark/>



Parish Soup & Bread Lenten Series for 2018 – Everyone is Welcome!

Once again during Lent, the Parish is hosting the Lenten Series in support of Development and Peace.

Format of the evening held in the Parish Hall:

5:45 – 6:30p.m. Grace begins our delicious, but simple supper of homemade soup and fresh bread, which also supports our Lenten fasting. A suggested donation of what it costs for your own supper goes to the Share Lent program of the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace. (Highchairs are available for the younger ones.)

6:30 – 7:00p.m. Each week features a guest speaker on a variety of topics concerning Social Justice in our community and our world.

7:15 – 7:45p.m. (approx.) Stations of the Cross led by parish ministries and groups.

Guest Speakers

February 16 Speaker: Coby Veeken, parishioner to speak about the Inner City Pastoral Ministry and Our Lady of Perpetual Help's connection with the Bissel Center. **(Please bring a plate of squares or cookies for the ICPM Lunch being served on Sunday, Feb. 18th by our volunteers at OLPH Parish).**

Soup provided by OLPH Staff

Stations of the Cross: Altar Servers

February 23 Speaker: Jeremy Cook, Justice and Compassion Pastor Sherwood Park Alliance will speak on "Bridging the Gap" What if...there was a way to combine local efforts to better support those who are fleeing violence and need local housing that is affordable?

Soup provided by ABJ Culinary

Stations of the Cross: Young Disciples

March 2 Speaker: Christina Kruszewski, Catholic Schools Program Officer for Development and Peace, Western Region to speak about the work of Development and Peace and her recent trip to Bolivia. **MASS WILL FOLLOW AT 7:00PM AND STATIONS OF THE CROSS AT 7:40PM**

Soup provided by RCIA

Stations of the Cross: Secular Franciscans

March 9 Speaker: Bruce Klanke, Senior Vice President, Community Engagement, for Catholic Social Services

Soup provided by CWL

Stations of the Cross: CWL

March 16 Speaker: Mary Pat Skene, parishioner and President of the Sherwood Park Conference of SSVP to speak about how SSVP brings the love of Christ to serve the poor on a person to person basis while treating each person with dignity and providing support as they struggle with crisis situations.

Soup and Stations of the Cross provided by Small Christian Community and People of Thanks

March 23 Speaker: Justin Gabinet, ABJ Catholic High School teacher and Student council Coordinator will speak on the Geomeer project and other Social Justice initiatives at ABJ.

Soup provided by Secular Franciscans

Stations of the Cross: OLPH Staff
