



Four Steps Beyond Ash Wednesday

Where do we go from here? If we want Ash Wednesday to be the first of many days reconnecting with our faith, here are four ways we can all step forward in faith:

1. **Reconnect with God:** Lent is a great time to meet Jesus again. We can rediscover his timeless message in the Scriptures. We can re-live his passion and death through Stations of the Cross. And we can renew ourselves through his constant presence in the Eucharist.
2. **Reconnect with the Poor:** Lent calls us to fast from our excess and to give to the poor and marginalized in society. Let us re-examine how we are blessed – and how we can use our gifts (financial, personal, and spiritual) to love and serve those in need in our world today.
3. **Reconnect with the Church:** Going through Lent doesn't have to be done alone. The Church offers many opportunities for us to meet new people, work together for social concerns, and talk with spiritual guides on our journey of faith.
4. **Reconnect with Ourselves:** Lent is a chance to cleanse ourselves – to release our sins through the grace God offers us in reconciliation, to rest our struggles and worries in the loving arms of God, and to remember that great things await us when we reconnect with the Lord.

If you are ready to take these steps with us, we welcome you to start by reconnecting with a local Catholic parish and check out all the upcoming opportunities they have.

You can find a parish near you online - and see what's happening all around the Diocese of Joliet at the diocesan website: www.dioceseofjoliet.org.



Ash Wednesday

A Great Day to Reconnect



Welcome to our church today.

In the midst of our crazy lives, busy schedules, and the constant noise of our everyday world, Ash Wednesday is a perfect opportunity to slow down and reconnect - with God, with the poor, with the church, and with ourselves. We invite you to restart that journey now.

**We're so glad you've come.
Thank you for being here.**



What's so special about Ash Wednesday?



Since biblical times, believers have been putting ashes on their heads as a sign of penance and humility before God. The sign of the cross made with the ashes on Ash Wednesday is also a symbol of preparation for the sign of the cross made with holy water from the baptismal font on Easter Sunday.

Ash Wednesday marks the first day of the Lenten season, a sacred time for Christians to renew themselves

and to reconnect with their faith through serving the poor, praying with the church, and embarking on their own spiritual journey.

The first reading on Ash Wednesday from the prophet Joel says that this reconnection is not to be done alone, but with others (even strangers) who share our desire for God: "Proclaim a fast, call an assembly, gather the people, notify the congregation!" (Joel 2:15).

What makes Ash Wednesday so special is that it allows us to make a public witness to the fact that we all want to go deeper in our spiritual lives. It connects us with Christians around the world who are also making that statement with us.

Thank you for joining us on Ash Wednesday this year.



Do I have to be a practicing Catholic to receive ashes?

All are welcome to come and receive ashes on their foreheads, regardless of their church attendance. What is expected, however, is that the ashes are received with personal humility and an inner desire to repent for one's sins and grow closer to God. Perhaps these ashes might inspire you to come more often to church – to pray with others on the same journey of faith – and to learn more about Catholic traditions and practices.



As St. Paul says in the second reading this day: "Working together, then, we appeal to you *not* to receive the grace of God in vain" (2 Cor. 6:1).

In other words, don't let this wonderful occasion be both the beginning and the end of your Lenten journey this year. No matter how active you have previously been with your church, let Ash Wednesday be the first of many great days to come as you renew, refocus, and reconnect with your faith.

What do I do when I go up to receive ashes?

Simply walk up to the priest or minister, who will make the sign of the cross on your forehead with the ashes. Listen prayerfully to the words the priest or minister will say to you today and receive them into your heart.

There is no need to say or do anything when you approach the person distributing ashes. Just come forward with a humble heart and a willing soul to make a difference in your faith life this Lent. For some suggestions on how to do that, turn the page...