

Ash Wednesday

And

The Covenant of Lent

Ash Wednesday Services  
March 9, 2011  
6:30 am, Noon, 7:00 pm  
Nursery available at 7:00 pm



## Ash Wednesday

The observance of Lent as a penitential season for all Christians originated in the penitential discipline of the early Church, when those who were excommunicated for sinful behavior were reconciled to the Church. In the sixth century, the beginning of Lent was moved from a Sunday to the seventh Wednesday before Easter, thus making Lent 40 days long. (Sundays are not counted since every Sunday is a celebration of the Lord's resurrection. This is why we have Sundays IN Lent rather than Sundays OF Lent.) During Lent, the penitents wore sackcloth and ashes while they fasted and prayed. During Holy Week, they were reconciled to the Church. As time passed, Lent acquired a new dimension, becoming a time for all Christians to practice self-examination and discipline, and the ancient Rites acquired new meaning.

The service of Ash Wednesday continues this ancient tradition. It begins with lessons that have been used since the early days of the Church: Joel's call for a universal fast and Matthew's reminder that God is not impressed by the outward signs of repentance, but the true repentance of the inner person. We are called to observe a Holy Lent, and ashes are placed on the forehead of those who desire it. The Penitential Litany follows, reminding us again that we are a sinful people in need of God's forgiveness, and that God has acted to deliver us from our sinful state.

At the Eucharist, which concludes the service, we will be using Rite I. It is our local tradition to utilize the Ash Wednesday Litany and Rite I throughout all of Lent. It is our hope that this serves as a weekly renewal of our Lenten observances.

All Christians should seek to begin this Holy Season of Lent with corporate prayer. Please join us for our **Ash Wednesday services**.

# Lent

The season of Lent had its origin in the liturgical practices of the early Church. Although infant baptism was practiced, adult baptism was the norm, and it was customary to have a period of preparation for those desiring to join the Church. This period, called the catechumenate, began with a public liturgical act, in which the catechumen declared his/her desire to follow Christ and was marked with the sign of the cross. In some areas, the sign of the cross was made with dust or ashes upon the catechumen's forehead. Following a period of instruction and examination, the catechumen was baptized, usually during the vigil of Easter.

As the Church grew, there was a need to address those who had fallen into sin following baptism. Such individuals were excommunicated; and after a period of public penitence, they were readmitted to Holy Communion. Recognizing the inherent symbolism, the Church readmitted penitents to the fellowship of the Church on the Eve of Easter, so that they could receive Communion on Easter, the celebration of the triumph of Christ over evil and death. Eventually, it became the custom for all Christians to observe this pre-paschal period as a time of self-examination and discipline.

This period came to be called "Lent" (from the Anglo-Saxon word *lengthen*, which referred to the lengthening days of the spring), and was generally forty days in length. Sundays were always excluded from Lent since Sunday is always a celebration of the Resurrection. In Eastern Churches, Saturday is also excluded, it being the Sabbath. (The Eastern Churches follow the Early Church practice of differentiating between the Sabbath, Saturday, and the Lord's Day, Sunday.) This Lent, for those in Western Church, begins on a Wednesday, seven weeks before Easter, and concludes with the beginning of the Vigil of Easter.

As we begin our anticipation of the Paschal Feast of Easter, let us endeavor to keep a Holy Lent by self-examination and repentance, prayer and self-denial, and by reading and meditating on the Scriptures, that we may be ready to celebrate with joy our victory in Christ Jesus.

# Our Lenten Disciplines

Although Lent originated as a season of preparation for Baptism, it gradually became a penitential season for all Christians. It became customary for all Christians to prepare for Easter by prayer and fasting. Thus, in the minds of many, Lent has become a time to “give up something.”

While we all have habits that we should “give up”, Lent should also be a time to do something positive – to spend more time in prayer, or reading of the Scripture, to visit the sick and lonely, to enrich our devotional lives through spiritual reading and to strengthen our family life through true recreation. In order for our Lenten Discipline to be truly effective, it must be something which has importance in our lives and which we feel is pleasing to God.

Our Lenten Discipline should be something which benefits not only ourselves, but the lives of those around us – our family, friends and neighbors. *We will continue the second offering for Outreach during Lent.* To take up such a discipline thus becomes a way of improving our lives in relationship to God as well as a silent witness to the love of God in our lives.

## Making Your Lenten Covenant

The time to prepare for a good Lent is now – not on Shrove Tuesday, just before going to bed. Lent is a period of fasting and penitential discipline undertaken for the glory of God and the good of our souls. Its annual observance is solemn duty for all Church members, required of every communicant by the regulations of the Prayer Book. As members of Our Lord’s Body we share with Him the sorrow and agony which He bore during the last of His days on earth. We also strengthen our wills by means of self-discipline, learning to obey the will of God better; and thus we prepare ourselves for the celebration of Easter, the greatest and most joyful event of the Christian Year. A person can never know the greatness of Easter until he has suffered in company with our Blessed Lord and shared with Him the pain of bearing the sins of the World.

For Lent to serve the purpose in our lives for which it was intended, a certain amount of preparation is necessary.

**FIRST** of all, we must clear our calendars; we simply cannot keep a good Lent without giving our spirituality opportunity for growth. Perhaps your non-church friends will not understand. This is a part of the price we pay for our religion. But, by and large, they will respect you for having a religion that makes some demands on you, and your courage in conscientiously acting upon principles.

The **SECOND** thing we have to do is settle upon some kind of fasting and take it seriously during Lent. (Except Sunday - Sundays are never a part of Lent, and any rules we make for ourselves do not apply on this day.)

The **THIRD** thing we have to do is to plan how to use our time for the profit of our souls. This means extra worship, extra prayer, and extra study. It means working particularly hard at doing things we ought normally to be doing, but are not, and at avoiding the things we normally ought to be avoiding, but are not.

On the basis of these principles, below is an outline of what a Lenten Rule would look like, for guidance. The first two items you find listed should be taken for granted as a part of every Church member's Lenten observance. The others will vary depending on each person's circumstances. Thus the examples which are given are only suggestions (with the exception of the first two), and there are many other things which might be included as a substitute.

Write out your rule on paper, in duplicate. Between now and Ash Wednesday, bring one copy with you to offer at the Altar as your sacrifice of love of God, and ask for the strength from your Communion to observe it carefully and without fail. Your rule will be kept on the Altar throughout Lent. Please do not sign your Lenten rule. We wish all of you a most blessed Lent, that we may grow in love of our Blessed Lord, who suffered and died at this time for you and me, because He loves us.

## Simple Lenten Covenant

1. Will attend the Ash Wednesday service and keep the day as a strict fast.
2. Will attend Church on the Three Solemn Days of Holy Week and keep Good Friday as a strict fast.

3. Will forego coffee, contributing an amount equivalent to what I usually spend on it to my Lenten Offering.
4. Will add morning prayers upon rising in my usual daily schedule.
5. Will attend Friday morning prayers and meditation.
6. Will prepare to make my confession during Holy Week.



3. Will give up all sweets, contributing an amount equivalent to what I usually spend on it to my Lenten Offering.
4. Will make a 15 minute meditation each week on the Passion and Death of our Lord.
5. Will prepare to make my confession during Holy Week.



3. Will give up smoking, contributing an amount equivalent to what I usually spend on it to my Lenten offering.
4. Will add an examination of conscience, confessing my sins during the past day to God at my daily evening prayer.
5. Will read a portion of Holy Scripture each day.
6. Will visit one person each week who is alone and whom I have long postponed visiting.



3. Will forego all meat, contributing an amount equivalent to what I usually spend on it to my Lenten Offering.
4. Will make the Stations of the Cross part of my Lenten devotions.
5. Will read one book on the Spiritual Life.
6. Will attend Friday morning prayers and meditation.



3. Will forego all alcoholic beverages during Lent, contributing an amount equivalent to what I usually spend on it to my Lenten offering.
4. Will make a 15 minute quiet visit to the Church Sanctuary at least once a week.
5. Will attend Friday morning prayers and meditation.



3. Will not eat between meals during Lent, contributing an amount equivalent to what I usually spend on it to my Lenten offering.
4. Will forego all TV watching, spending the time in Spiritual reading.
5. Will prepare to make my confession during Holy Week.

# True Lenten Discipline

Lent should be more than a time for fasting. It should also be a joyous season of feasting. Lent is a time to fast from certain things.

*Fast from judging others;  
Feast on Christ dwelling in them.*

*Fast from hostility;  
Feast on nonresistance.*

*Fast from emphasis on differences;  
Feast on the unity of all life.*

*Fast from bitterness;  
Feast on forgiveness.*

*Fast from apparent darkness;  
Feast on the reality of all life.*

*Fast from self-concern;  
Feast on compassion for others.*

*Fast from thoughts of illness;  
Feast on healing power.*

*Fast from personal anxiety;  
Feast on eternal truth.*

*Fast from words that pollute;  
Feast on phrases that purify*

*Fast from discouragement;  
Feast on hope.*

*Fast from discontent;  
Feast on gratitude.*

*Fast from facts that depress;  
Feast on verities that uplift.*

*Fast from anger;  
Feast on patience*

*Fast from lethargy;  
Feast on enthusiasm.*

*Fast from pessimism;  
Feast on optimism*

*Fast from suspicion;  
Feast on truth.*

*Fast from worry;  
Feast on God's providence.*

*Fast from thoughts that weaken;  
Feast on promises that inspire.*

*Fast from complaining;  
Feast on appreciation*

*Fast from shadows of sorrow;  
Feast on the sunlight of serenity.*

*Fast from negatives;  
Feast on affirmatives.*

*Fast from idle gossip;  
Feast on purposeful silence.*

*Fast from unrelenting pressures;  
Feast on unceasing prayer.*

*Fast from problems that overwhelm;  
Feast on prayer that sustains.*

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