

WHAT IS ASH WEDNESDAY and LENT? HOW TO EXPLAIN THEM TO KIDS

What is Ash Wednesday?

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent. The faithful go to church to receive a sign of the cross on their foreheads from ashes (ashes from the blessed palms used on Palm Sunday). This mark is a reminder of our mortality and a call for repentance. The pastor blesses the ashes and says, "Remember, man, that thou art dust, and to dust thou shalt return". The message of Ash Wednesday service is, "**Pray like no one is watching you. Fast like no one is watching you. Do good like no one is watching you. God knows.**" Something we strive for each and every day; but, it's highlighted on Ash Wednesday to set the tone for Lent.

What is Lent?

Lent is the season of preparation for Easter. It starts on Ash Wednesday and ends on Easter, lasting for 40 days (not counting Sundays). We prepare for Easter by fasting and practicing spiritual discipline during this time - to reflect on His sacrifices. Basically, Lent is a time for "spring cleaning" our lives while giving thanks to God and strengthening our relationship with Him.

Lent with kids.

Young children have a hard time understanding Lent. One way of explaining Lent is that it's a time to bring us closer to God. In our busy lives we fill our selves with candy, buy new toys, play video games and watch television which makes us happy but that happiness is temporary. During Lent we stop filling our lives with temporary happiness and make more room for God. The church encourages prayer, fasting and almsgiving during Lent as ways we can turn our hearts and minds to God. During this time we attempt to incorporate activities in our daily lives which will strengthen us. Many people "give up" something important to them for the 40 days of Lent. To learn how to sacrifice or give up things is a way of learning unselfishness.

The "Jelly Bean Prayer" for children is a sweet way of teaching children all about what Lent really means. Using various colors of jelly beans to describe a virtue, children are given a jelly bean for each good deed collecting them up until Easter.

Red for the blood of Christ (a sacrifice)

Green for the shade of the palm (doing a good deed).

Yellow for God's light (kindness to others).

Orange for prayers at twilight (good behavior at bed time prayers).

Purple for days of sorrow (apologizing to someone).

Pink for each new tomorrow (forgiving others).

Starting on Ash Wednesday, begin rewarding your child(ren) with a jelly bean of the appropriate color each time they do something that corresponds with an act. On Easter, allow them to receive all the jelly beans they have collected.