

# Ash Wednesday

## Faith Focus

How does the celebration of Ash Wednesday help us live as members of the Church?

## The Word of the Lord

This is the first reading for Ash Wednesday. Read and discuss it with your family.

## First Reading

2 Corinthians 5:20-6:2

On Ash Wednesday, you may go to the mall or into your favorite restaurant and see any number of people with grey smudges on their foreheads. Some people may wonder what that's all about. But Catholics from all over the world can tell you that each of those people with the dirty mark on his or her forehead is a disciple of Jesus Christ. They are all members of the Body of Christ, the Church.

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent and reminds us of our Baptism and our need to live as disciples of Jesus. It reminds us that we need to become more like Christ. We give the name *conversion* to our becoming more like Christ.

On Ash Wednesday, when the sign of the cross is traced in ashes on our foreheads, we remember that we are children of God. Like our first parents, Adam and Eve, we were created out of dust. Like them, we also sin. Beginning on Ash Wednesday and during the season of Lent, Catholics will focus our attention on ways we can live our lives more in line with God's will. We will remember that Jesus began his ministry by spending forty days in the desert, fasting and praying. We remember that Jesus rejected the temptations of the Devil. We remember that Jesus was strengthened by the Holy Spirit and his love of God the Father.

From her earliest days, the Church has used ashes as a public sign that a person has sinned and needs to turn away from sin and back to God. When our foreheads are marked with ashes in the form of a cross, it symbolizes that we acknowledge that we have sinned. We promise that we will cooperate with God's grace. We will work on changing our attitudes and actions. On Ash Wednesday, we pray for a change of heart. We join with the whole Church and proclaim:

*Rend your hearts, not your garments, and return to the LORD your God, for gracious and merciful is he, slow to anger, rich in kindness, and relenting in punishment."*

JOEL 2:13



# Lent

## Faith Focus

What are we called to do during Lent?

## The Word of the Lord

Choose this year's Gospel reading for the First Sunday of Lent. Read and discuss it with your family.

### Year A

Matthew 4:1-11

### Year B

Mark 1:12-15

### Year C

Luke 4:1-13

## What You See

In our churches, we see signs that Lent is a season of discipline. The color of Lent is purple, the color of penitence. No flowers or brightly colored decorations greet us. We sing no joyous Alleluia or Gloria.

For many of us, the winter landscape seems bare. Leaves fall from trees, flowers die, and grass turns brown. But we trust that after winter, spring will come and bring new life. Each year during Lent, we renew the new life of Christ we received in Baptism.

Lent begins on Ash Wednesday. On Ash Wednesday, the Church gathers to begin our Lenten journey. As ashes are placed on our foreheads, we hear the words:

“Repent, and believe in the Gospel.”

*ROMAN MISSAL*

During Lent, the Church calls us to enter more fully into Jesus' Death and Resurrection. We make sacrifices to do this. We may decide to share more of our time and talents with others. We may give up something that we enjoy. We want habits of goodness to live in us. We support one another in our decisions during Lent. Together we look forward to celebrating the joy of Easter.



# Take Up Your Cross

Choose two small twigs or pieces of wood and tie them with twine to form a simple cross. Place your cross on the prayer table as you gather for prayer. Then pray the prayer together.

**Leader:** During Lent, we walk with Jesus. We hope to share in his Resurrection at Easter.

**Reader:** (*Proclaim Mark 10:35-45.*)

**Leader:** Jesus looked ahead at the Cross he would bear. Are you willing to take up your small cross this Lent?

**All:** We are.

**Leader:** Let us pause and decide on one thing we know we need to do to be more like Jesus. (*Pause.*) As I call your name, please come forward. (*Name*), will you strive to take up your Lenten cross and follow Jesus?

**Student:** I will.

(*Choose a wooden cross from the prayer table.*)

**Leader:** May the Cross of Christ remind us to open our minds and hearts to God.

**All:** Amen!

**Leader:** May we all walk with Jesus and enter into the joy of Easter.

**All:** Amen!

**Leader:** May we pray for one another. May we support one another as we take up our cross as a sign of our love of Jesus, who carried his Cross because of his love for us.

**All:** Amen!

MY FAITH  
CHOICE

During the season of Lent, I will turn away from sin. I will

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Pray, "I have sinned against you. Have mercy on me, O Lord."

# Palm Sunday

## Faith Focus

Why do we celebrate Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord?

## The Word of the Lord

Choose this year's Gospel reading for Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord. Read and discuss it with your family.

### Year A

Matthew 26:14-27, 66 or 27:11-54

### Year B

Mark 14:1-15:47 or 15:1-39

### Year C

Luke 22:14-23, 56 or 23:1-49

When a well-known person comes to your school or town, you welcome them with a marching band and banners and balloons. When Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem, the people gave him a special welcome.

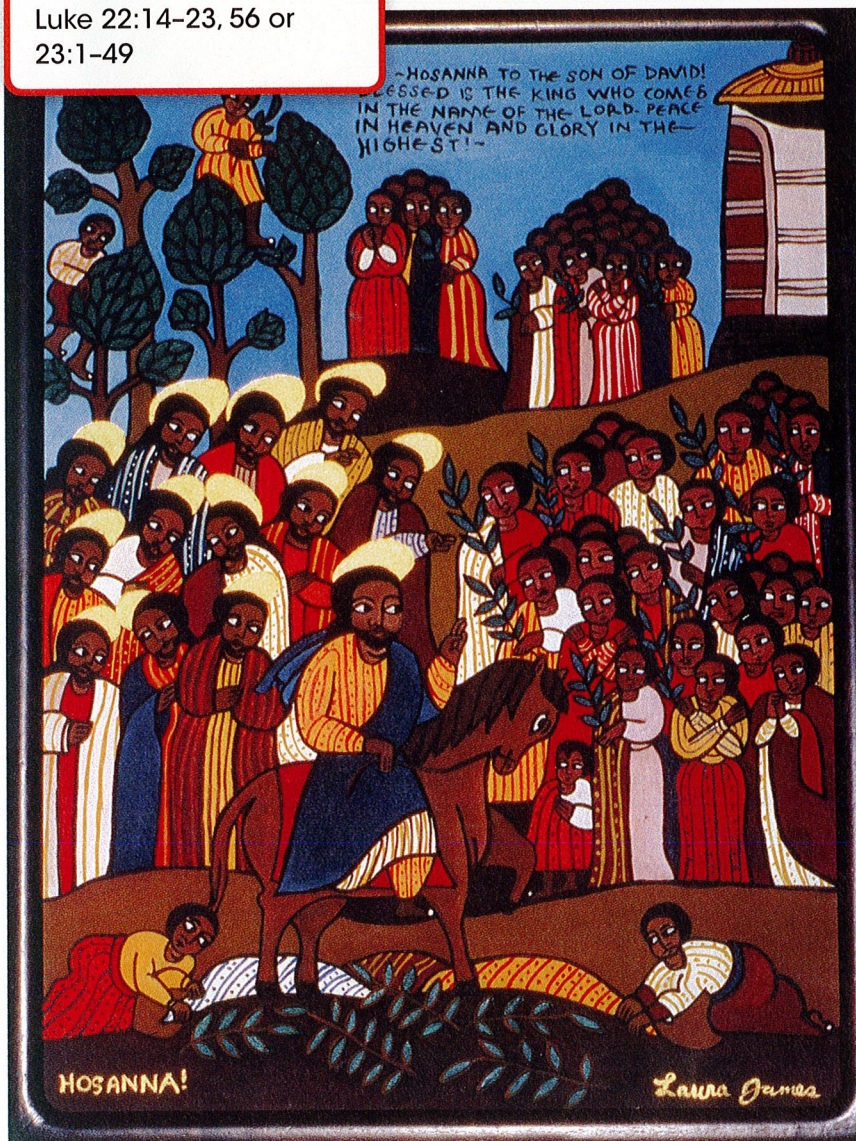
On that day, the people of Jerusalem welcomed Jesus as the Messiah. He did not ride on a mighty horse or in a gilded chariot as a great soldier or a conquering hero. Jesus entered Jerusalem riding a donkey. But as he entered, the people cheered him as they would a great king:

*"Hosanna to the Son of David;  
blessed is he who comes in the name of the  
Lord;  
hosanna in the highest."* MATTHEW 21:9

The people proclaimed "Hosanna", a greeting of joy and praise, which means "Lord, grant salvation."

The people spread cloaks on the road to make the path smooth and less dusty for Jesus. They waved branches taken from palm trees. This welcome of Jesus as the Messiah riding on a donkey reminds us that Jesus is the king of everyone, even the lowly. Jesus is a king filled with compassion and care.

The celebration of Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord begins Holy Week. We begin our celebration with a procession. Everyone walks into church carrying palm branches. This recalls the day Jesus rode into Jerusalem.



# Hosanna! A Meditation

- Sit quietly.
- Close your eyes and breathe slowly.
- Remember the story of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem.
- Compare the meaning of this story to your own life and share your thoughts with Jesus. Take the time to praise him for the gifts he has brought to your life.
- After a few quiet moments, write down any key words or phrases that will help you remember this prayer experience.

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- To close your meditation, pray aloud with your class the words with which the people welcomed Jesus to Jerusalem:

**"Hosanna to the Son of David:**

**blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord;  
hosanna in the highest."**

**MATTHEW 21:9**



**MY FAITH  
CHOICE**

This day, Jesus is welcomed as the Messiah. I will honor Jesus on Palm Sunday. I will

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**Praise Jesus, the Messiah, and welcome him into your heart.**