



Dear Parishioners,

This coming Wednesday is Ash Wednesday, the beginning of the Sacred Season of Lent, which is an invitation to all Catholics to enter into an extended retreat in preparation for the annual celebration of the Lord's Paschal Mystery; the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus.

The Bishop's Ceremonial, #249, reminds us, *"The annual Lenten season (which begins on Ash Wednesday) is the fitting time to climb the holy mountain of Easter. . .the faithful, ever more attentive to the Word of God and prayer, prepare themselves by penance for the renewal of their baptismal promises."*

Due to the pandemic, the distribution of ashes will take place in a different form. Unlike the usual signing of the cross with ashes on the forehead of each person, the Vatican is requesting that they be distributed by sprinkling them on the crown of each person's head. This ancient manner of distribution is what it described in the Scriptures. It is also the normal practice in many countries throughout the world at this time. Either way, the acceptance of the ashes being imposed on us is an outward sign of our commitment to follow the discipline of Lent:

- 1) That we commit ourselves to grow in the practice of our faith through prayer, fasting and abstinence on the days appointed, additional acts of charity and spiritual communal gatherings.
- 2) That we will address the reality of personal sin in our lives with the determination to seek forgiveness through the Sacrament of Penance at an appropriate time prior to Easter Sunday.
- 3) That we will deepen our knowledge of our faith through prayerful reflection in order to make a sincere profession of faith in preparation for the renewal of our baptismal promises.
- 4) That we will participate in Sunday Mass, either in person, through television or some other means of social media, to deepen our commitment to this perfect act of praise and thanksgiving to God, to have the opportunity to be fed by God's Sacred Word and to receive Jesus in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, if not in person then spiritually.

On Easter Sunday, having made these important preparations, we are best prepared to recommit ourselves to Jesus and the Church through the renewal of our baptismal promises.

While there is no obligation to receive ashes on Ash Wednesday it is important to keep in mind the purpose of receiving them, which is an exterior manifestation of our interior decision to enter the Sacred Season of Lent. It is possible to have this intention whether or not we receive ashes that day. **Again, if you are planning to come to one of the Ash Wednesday Services or Masses it is necessary that you reserve a seat on our parish website ([www.stjamesrcchurch.org](http://www.stjamesrcchurch.org)) or by calling the parish office for assistance.**

May the Lord strengthen our resolve to enter fully into the Lenten Season.

*F. John*