

TREASURES of OUR FAITH  
by: Deacon Ryan Adams

Greetings brothers and sisters. As we go through this 'Year of Faith', each week we will take a journey together to deepen and rediscover our faith as Catholic Christians. We will take time to look at the rich traditions of our Church, we'll look at what certain things signify and their symbolism, take time to answer some frequently asked questions and look at why we do certain things as Catholics. This week we'll look at Ash Wednesday.

Ash Wednesday is a day of repentance and it marks the beginning of Lent. According to the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke; Jesus spent 40 days fasting in the desert before the beginning of his public ministry, Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of this liturgical period of prayer and fasting. Ash Wednesday derives its name from the practice of placing ashes on the foreheads of the faithful as a sign of mourning and repentance to God. The ashes are made from the blessed palms used in the Palm Sunday celebration of the previous year. While the ashes symbolize penance and contrition, they are also a reminder that God is gracious and merciful to those who call on Him with repentant hearts. The distribution of ashes reminds us of our own mortality and calls us to repentance. The ashes that we receive are a reminder of our own sinfulness, and many Catholics leave them on their foreheads all day as a reminder and as a sign of humility. Ashes are a symbol of penance, and they help us develop a spirit of humility and sacrifice. On Ash Wednesday, when the ashes are imposed on the foreheads of the faithful, the priest, or assisting minister, marks the forehead of each participant with black ashes that have been blessed with holy water, in the sign of a cross, the priest or minister traditionally says one of the following when applying the ashes: *Remember that thou art dust, and to dust thou shalt return* which is from the Book of Genesis or *Turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel* which is from St. Mark's Gospel. The Church emphasizes the penitential nature of Ash Wednesday by calling us to fast and abstain from meat and to contemplate a spirit of repentance. This fasting and abstinence is not simply a form of penance, it is also a call for us to take stock of our spiritual lives. As Lent begins, we should set out specific spiritual goals we would like to reach before Easter and decide how we will pursue them. The Church calls on us to enter the Lenten season with reflection, prayer and penance in our hearts.