

Ash Wednesday at Home

If you do not already have one, prepare a home altar or devotional space. You can use it throughout the days of Lent. One way to do this is gather some items and place where you gather for meals, where you study, or where you will see it first thing in the morning or as you retire each day. Items you may wish to include items such as: a candle to remind us that Jesus is the Light of the World even in our darkest days, a small bowl with or without water to remind us of our baptism, a cross one you have or a homemade one for this season, nails to remind us of the sacrifice Jesus made for us, a Bible, symbols of times or places you have been aware of God's presence in your life. You can arrange them on a tray if you will need to move them during Lent.

Light the candle. If you are with family or friends, someone begins with the words:

We gather in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Today we begin our Lenten journey. During the next 40 days as we gather with the larger faith community, do personal devotions and acts of service, we will hear again and remember all the Jesus did in his life and death and resurrection.

Read Psalm 103:8-14. If you are part of a group, you may wish to read it responsively alternating verses.

Pray:

God of love and forgiveness, we begin our Lenten journey knowing that on our own our lives fall short of what you desire for us. You give generously, and we hold onto things afraid that we will not have enough. In Jesus you model the life of a servant, and we often prefer to be served. You speak words of grace and love, and we can let our words be full of insults and criticism. You lavish us with forgiveness while we may choose to hold onto the smallest infraction someone may have committed against us. We pray for your mercy. Help us to turn our lives to you. Break down the obstacles we build so that your love may flow through us to our family, our classmates and colleague, our neighborhood, and your world. Amen.

On Ash Wednesday we usually gather as the church community for the imposition of ashes and to share in the celebration of Holy Communion. We are reminded of our own mortality and our need for God's grace which is so freely given to us.

With water from the bowl, mark yourself or one another with the sign of the cross on the forehead. You can use words like "Remember your baptism today and always. You have been marked with the cross of Christ and sealed with the Holy Spirit."

Read Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Reflect or talk together about what Lenten disciplines you may wish to observe this year. The traditional disciplines are prayer, almsgiving, and fasting. Remember the disciplines are not a "self-improvement" plan but a means to become more aware of God's presence. You may wish to share with one another a discipline you will undertake this Lent. You may wish to write it down and place it in an envelope and place that on your home altar.

Close with the Lord's Prayer.

Extinguish the candle.