

How To Impose Ashes on Ash Wednesday

This week, February 17th, is Ash Wednesday and the beginning of the season of Lent. For those who are joining us for Ash Wednesday this year, there is a time in the liturgy for the imposition of ashes. Usually this is done by the clergy or other leaders in the liturgy. But at this year's virtual liturgy, you get to impose ashes on yourself, or perhaps designate a person to impose ashes on all the family members gathered.

There are a few tricks-of-the-trade when imposing ashes I'd like to tell you before we begin. You may use the ashes we sent out in Lent in a Bag this year, or you can make your own ashes the traditional method by burning palm leaves from last year's Palm Sunday liturgy, or if you don't have palm leaves you may even burn other dried plant leaves. If you decide to make your own ashes, then let me warn you that palm leaves burn hot, fast, put out a lot of smoke, and they smell awful while burning. Don't forget to stir or grind them after burning to produce a fine ash.

Use a dot of olive oil on your finger and pick up a pinch of ash. Now rub your finger down the pad of your thumb as if you are spreading the ashes out slightly. Now you are ready.

Trace a cross on your forehead with the ashes or on another's forehead and say:
Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return.

You'll find that ashes can be a bit of a pain to wash off your fingers afterward. Here's a suggestion for cleaning up. To clean the ashes off your fingers, rub your fingers on a slice of lemon, and then clean off the lemon juice by rubbing them on a piece of bread. Afterward you can then wash with soap and water.

We hope you can join us not only on Ash Wednesday but also on your continuing journey through Lent. Blessings to you for a Holy Lent.