

Soon we will start a new liturgical time. This is a special time, with a personal and social character.

- **Special**, because this is a time of divine grace.
- **Social**, because in this time Jesus teaches us that we should notice our neighbor, not as our fellow man, but a brother or sister.
- **Personal**, because we look deeply into our hearts and make decisions about changes in our personal life.

Name of this season is **Lent**, which we will start in **Ash Wednesday**. It is also a season of penance, reflection, and fasting which prepares us for Christ's Resurrection on Easter Sunday, through which we attain redemption.

Why we receive the ashes?

Following the example of people from Nineveh (Jonah 3. 1-10), who did penance in sackcloth and ashes, our foreheads are marked with ashes to humble our hearts and reminds us that life passes away on Earth. We remember this when we hear: "**Remember, Man is dust, and unto dust you shall return.**"

Ashes are a symbol of penance made sacramental by the blessing of the Church, and they help us develop a spirit of humility and sacrifice. The distribution of ashes reminds us of our own mortality and calls us to repentance. In the early Church, Ash Wednesday was the day on which those who had sinned, and who wishes to be admitted to the Church, would begin their public penance. The ashes that we receive are a reminder of our own sinfulness, and many Christians leave them in their foreheads all day as a sign of humility. In the earlier times, the distribution of ashes was followed by a penitential procession. The ashes are made from the blessed palms used in the Palm Sunday celebration of the previous year. The ashes are christened with Holy Water and are scented by exposure to incense. 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**. His Divine mercy is of utmost importance during the season of Lent, and the Church calls on us to seek that mercy during the entire Lenten season with reflection, prayer and penance.

Period of Lent: - 40 days.

The number 40 has always had special spiritual significance regarding preparation. On Mount Sinai, preparing to receive the Ten Commandments, "**Moses** stayed there with the Lord for 40 days and 40 nights, without eating any food or drinking any water" (Ex 34:28). **Prophet Elijah** walked "40 days and 40 nights" to the mountain of the Lord, Mount Horeb (1 Kings 19: 8). 40 years of journey on the desert. Most importantly, **Jesus** fasted and prayed for "40 days and nights" in the desert before He began His public ministry (Mt 4:2).

The purpose of Lent is to be a season of fasting, self-denial, spiritual growth, conversion and simplicity. The word Lent which comes from the Teutonic (Germanic) language springtime can be viewed as a spiritual spring cleaning: a time for taking spiritual inventory and the cleaning out of those things which hinder our corporate and personal relationships with Jesus Christ and our service to him. Lent is also good time to develop or strengthen a discipline of our daily prayer. **The Lenten season** reminds us also that prayer is our daily spiritual meal, and not for God but for us. The most important purpose of Lent is our personal conversion and through conversion become again a child of God and for another person become a brother or sister.

I wish you a good Lent and good preparation for Easter.

father Stan
Father Stanislaw (Stan) Fiuk