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The Significance of ASH WEDNESDAY¹

He said to him, "Walk through the streets of Jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of all who weep and sigh because of the detestable sins being committed in their city." Ezekiel 9:4 (NLT)

Have you ever noticed how once a year, there are a lot of people walking around with an ash cross on their foreheads? You probably knew it had something to do with Lent, but you weren't sure why the ash cross was significant.

Well, many churches (both Protestant and Catholic) have special worship celebrations on Ash Wednesday that are penitential and reflective in nature. In addition to a challenging message, prayer and contemplation, there are long periods of silence where forgiveness and redemption begins. Worshipers experience communal confession, as well as moments where they are prompted to silently confess sins and pray. Consequently, the congregation is invited to receive ashes on their foreheads. Usually, the priest or pastor dips his finger into the ashes and spreads the "cross pattern" on the person's forehead while quoting: **"From dust you came and from dust you will return."**

Oftentimes, the ashes are prepared by burning palm branches from the previous Palm Sunday. **The ashes of this holiday symbolize two main things: death and repentance.** "Ashes are equivalent to dust, and human flesh is composed of dust or clay (Genesis 2:7). When a human corpse decomposes, it returns to dust or ash." When a person is anointed with the ashes on Ash Wednesday, they are saying that they are sorry for their sins, and that they want to use the season of Lent to correct their faults, purify their hearts, control their desires and grow in holiness. This enables them to celebrate the Resurrection with renewed great joy. With this focus on our own mortality and sinfulness, Christians can enter into the Lent season solemnly, while also looking forward in greater anticipation and joy to the message of Easter and Christ's ultimate victory over sin and death. This year **Ash Wednesday was March 6, 2019**, the first day of Lent, a day of reflection and repentance from sin.

¹ <https://www.christianity.com/church/church-life/what-is-ash-wednesday-why-do-christians-celebrate-it.html>

"And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen." Matthew 28:18 – 20

