



From the Desk of Father Peter

Ash Wednesday: Remember, you are dust...

This coming week we as Catholics will show our stuff to the world. It is not expensive jewelry that you can buy at the Mall, but it is the ash of penitence we traditionally receive on our foreheads on Ash Wednesday. In my nearly 40 years as a priest of the Catholic Church, Ash Wednesday, which begins our Lenten season, has a very unique affect on us Catholics, and indeed many other Christian groups have imitated our tradition of receiving ashes on our foreheads.

Something about Ash Wednesday reminds us of God's desire to shape us into something beautiful.



Also, this reminder of our own mortality brings in people from everywhere. After the priest blesses and sprinkles the ashes with holy water, he, together with the deacon and in some cases, extraordinary ministers, puts the ashes on the foreheads of those present; the head being the seat of pride. He puts them on our foreheads to remind us of our hope, and as he does so, he says the words of Genesis 3:19. "Remember you are dust, and unto dust you shall return." Or the priest says, "Repent and believe in the Gospel."

We make no response to these words, we simply leave.

Will people really follow the directive of Lent to pray and seek repentance for their sin? Probably, if we are honest, some will, some won't. Ash Wednesday prayer invokes the begging of God's

grace and mercy on all. The ashes express and symbolize our need for repentance and are to be seen by us:

- To give us the grace and strength to do penance.*
- To give us the spirit of contrition deep in our hearts.*
- To secure pardon of sin for those who receive the ashes.*
- To be a spiritual help for all who confess their sins.*

After we leave church on Ash Wednesday, we leave the ashes on our foreheads until they wear off naturally over the course of the day's activities. They are a public witness to those things in our society we sometimes do not wish to embrace: conversion of the heart, the reality of death, and the hope of the Resurrection in Our Lord Jesus Christ. Are we ready for Lent to begin? I invite each of us to take our struggles and challenges and walk to Calvary with Jesus.

In her wisdom, the Church invites us once again to embark on the Lenten journey. In the coming days, we will have the chance to discover just how gracious and merciful our God is. Through Scripture and the wisdom of the Church we will have countless opportunities to respond to God's grace and mercy—through acts of repentance, generosity, worship, forgiveness, and in acts of service to one another.

Whatever else we may take on or give up this Lent, we definitely need to lean into the simple, enjoy-able practices that strengthen community—like family dinners, and helping the needy through the mite box.

Let us pray that the same God who graciously transforms our simple bread and wine into the Body and Blood of his Son will

*lovingly transform each of us so that we might rise, be reshaped
and renewed, in the glory of Easter.*



Transform us Lord in the Eucharist.

Fr. Peter Enyan-Boadu