



## Ash Wednesday – *For Personal Prayer and Reflection*

On Wednesday we will move into that part of the Church’s year called **Lent**, the season which begins with the symbol of ashes. For us in Australia this symbol has particular significance for us after the devastating bushfires that have ravaged so much of our country in recent weeks. From the tragedy, the loss of life, the heartache, the ‘burning’ we have witnessed the outpouring of love, generosity, kindness, new life. When such events occur often, we are aware that these experiences are places of possibility. From the ash of bushfires grass and plants spring green.

Traditionally Lent is

- a time of Penance....*we do without something,*
- a time of extra prayer
- a time of giving to those in need.

Often summed up as a time of *prayer, fasting* and *alms*.

We can place these three things together and call Lent a time of re-membering ...

I remember my Original Blessing of being made in the image and likeness of God. That means within me is a spark of the Divine and I have all it takes to turn this spark into something living and real.

Lent reminds me to live from this image of God and not from the ego I have created for myself.

How would it be for me to reflect today and as I journey through Lent

- What are the places of possibility for me?
- How can I strive to recognise the spark of the Divine in those who surround me?
- How can I respond to God who invites me to reflect more of God’s image as I relate with and reach out to others?
- How can I make space for God in my life each day?

As we journey through these days of Lent may we remember that we are not alone, that we are immersed in the mystery of God who accompanies us every moment of every day.

So this Lent let us live from the Presence of God within each of us....let us be kind in word and deed, let us be forgiving and compassionate, and let us live love sincerely because “Love comes from God” (1Jn 4:7) and “whoever lives with love lives in God” (Jn 4:16).

### **We pray:**

*I know that Lent is going to be a very hard time for me. The choice for your way has to be made every moment of my life. I have to choose thoughts that are your thoughts, words that are your words, and actions that are your actions. There are not times or places without choices. And I know how deeply I resist choosing you.*

*Please, Lord, be with me at every moment and in every place. Give me the strength and the courage to live this season faithfully, so that, when Easter comes, I will be able to taste with joy the new life that you have prepared for me. Amen.*

**Henri Nouwen**



## Pope Francis' Lenten Tips

1. **Get rid of the lazy addiction to evil.** Lent is a 'powerful' season, a turning point that can foster change and conversion in each of us. We all need to improve, to change for the better.
2. **Do something that hurts.** Lent is a fitting time for self-denial; we would do well to ask ourselves what we can give up in order to help and enrich others by our own poverty. Let us not forget that real poverty hurts. No self-denial is real without this dimension of penance. I distrust a charity that costs nothing and does not hurt.
3. **Don't remain indifferent.** Indifference to our neighbour and to God also represents a real temptation for us Christians. Each year during Lent we need to hear once more the voice of the prophets who cry out and trouble our conscience.
4. **Pray:** Make our hearts like yours! During this Lent, then, brothers and sisters, let us all ask the Lord: Make our hearts like yours (*Litany of the Sacred Heart of Jesus*). In this way we will receive a heart which is firm and merciful, attentive and generous, a heart which is not closed or indifferent.
5. **Take part in the sacraments.** Lent is a favourable time for letting Christ serve us so that we in turn may become more like him. This happens whenever we hear the word of God and receive the sacraments, especially the Eucharist.
6. **Pray:** In the face of so many wounds that hurt us and could harden our hearts, we are called to dive into the sea of prayer, which is the sea of God's boundless love, to taste his tenderness. Lent is a time of prayer, of more intense prayer, more prolonged.
7. **Fast.** We must be careful not to practice a formal fast, or one which in truth 'satisfies' us because it makes us feel good about ourselves. Fasting makes sense if it also leads to some benefit for others, if it helps us to cultivate the style of the Good Samaritan, who bends down to his brother in need and takes care of him.
8. **Give Alms.** Today gratuitousness is often not part of daily life where everything is bought and sold. Everything is calculated and measured. Almsgiving helps us to experience giving freely, which leads to freedom from the obsession of possessing, from the fear of losing what we have, from the sadness of one who does not wish to share his wealth with others.
9. **Help the Poor.** In the poor and outcast we see Christ's face; by loving and helping the poor, we love and serve Christ. When power, luxury and money become idols, they take priority over the need for a fair distribution of wealth. Our consciences thus need to be converted to justice, equality, simplicity and sharing.
10. **Evangelize.** The Lord asks us to be joyous heralds of His message of mercy and hope! It is good to experience the joy that comes from consoling broken hearts and offering hope to our brothers and sisters who are experiencing darkness.

You probably won't be able to take huge steps forward in all of these areas. Instead, pick a couple that stand out to you and try to find practical ways to grow in your love of God and your love of your neighbour.

### POPE FRANCIS' WORDS

Do you want to fast this Lent?

- Fast from hurting words and say kind words.
- Fast from sadness and be filled with gratitude.
- Fast from anger and be filled with patience.
- Fast from pessimism and be filled with hope.
- Fast from worries and trust in God.
- Fast from complaints and contemplate simplicity.
- Fast from pressures and be prayerful.
- Fast from bitterness and fill you heart with joy.
- Fast from selfishness and be compassionate to other
- Fast from grudges and be reconciled.
- Fast from words and be silent so you can listen.