

**Ash Wednesday** marks the first day of the 40 days of Lent, a six-week period (excluding Sundays) dedicated to prayer, fasting, and reflection in preparation for the great celebration of Christ's Paschal Mystery in the Easter Triduum. The late Henri Nouwen described Lent as a time to re-focus and to re-enter a place of truth. It is here where we find our true identity.

Ash Wednesday is the best way to begin a season which calls us into self-examination as well as self-denial, into deeper contemplation about the mystery and grace of God's mercy, and towards more radical giving towards those most in need of comfort, sustenance, and hope.

The ancient practice of Ash Wednesday reminds us that we are mortal. It causes us to pause and look at our lives— remember what we are made of, remember where we are going- and encourages us to fully immerse ourselves in the Lenten season.