

LEARNING FOCUS 1: Lent, a time to remember the suffering and death of Jesus.

Lent is a time in the Church's year when the Christian family remembers the suffering and death of Jesus. During Lent, Christians try to be like Jesus. They practise 'dying' to their old ways in order to 'live' a new life. Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent. The priest blesses ashes (made from the previous year's Palm Sunday palms) and makes a cross with them on the forehead of each person who comes in procession to the altar.

The ashes symbolise the repentance of the person who receives them. In the past those who confessed their sins were required to stand outside the church wearing sack cloth and ashes to show they were truly sorry for what they had done wrong.

The Blessing and Distribution of Ashes:

At Mass on Ash Wednesday after the Homily, the priest says:

Dear brothers and sisters let us humbly ask God our Father that he be pleased to bless with the abundance of his grace these ashes, which we will put on our heads in penitence.

After a brief prayer in silence, he continues with a prayer such as:

O God, who desires not the death of sinners, but their conversion, mercifully hear our prayers and in your kindness be pleased to bless + these ashes, which we intend to receive upon our heads, that we, who acknowledge we are but ashes and shall return to dust, may, through a steadfast observance of Lent, gain pardon for sins and newness of life after the likeness of your Risen Son. Who lives and reigns for ever and ever.

R. Amen.

He sprinkles the ashes with holy water, then places ashes on the heads of all those present who come to him, and says to each one:

Repent, and believe in the Gospel.

Or:

Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.

Turning away from sin is a form of dying; the death of selfishness, laziness, jealousy and so on. Discuss with the children ways which prevent them from living a good life. Lent is a time to choose a new way of life and start again. Believing in the Gospel is about having a new life. It means being generous, hard-working and appreciating the gifts of others. Explore other ways in which Christians might bear witness to the Gospel.

KEY QUESTIONS

- Q What do the ashes symbolise?
- Q What does the prayer said during the Ash Wednesday service remind Christians of?
- Q What are Christians invited to think about and do during this time of Lent?
- Q Who are Christians hoping to emulate?
- Q In what ways can Christians begin to live a new life?

ACTIVITY

Compose your own version of the prayer which will help you and others to understand the meaning of Lent and its significance to Christians.