

Today is Ash Wednesday!

A Christian Holy Day, although not a traditional “holiday”.

For at least 1 300 years Christians gather on this otherwise unremarkable Wednesday to remember that:

- They are mortal and therefore have to contemplate eternity.
- If we are Christians, we also remember that we have “died for sin”, meaning that we died with Christ in order to become new people that follow Jesus and seek God’s will.
- And when we ponder all of this, we know that we are guilty of allowing the old, disobedient person to surface much too often and therefore we wish to repent, longing for forgiveness.

It all started with a tradition that developed during the 2nd century to baptize new converts to Christianity on Easter Sunday.

Christians then, as we should still do, took Paul’s teaching very seriously, that a new “me” is “resurrected” when through baptism I am ordained into Christ’s priesthood, to become a praying, serving child of God, sacrificing my whole life to his service.

Converts were prepared for the new baptized life for 40 days (excluding Sunday’s). During this time spiritual discipline was, with teaching, an important ingredient of this preparation, that started on a Wednesday. This 40 days became known as “Lent”. *And so our Christian fathers thought that if we on Easter Sunday will celebrate that we rose with Christ into a new life, we should also be reminded that the old sinful “me” has died with Christ.* Remembering all of this culminates on Good Friday, when we remember that Jesus died - and even Still Saturday, that Jesus was dead, in the tomb. But it starts on Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent, the season to remember Christ’s suffering and death, contemplating our death, our sins, our need to repent and our expectation to be raised to a new Easter Life in Jesus our Saviour!

On Ash Wednesday baptized Christians remember that we died with Christ. We remember that the old, lost, impure and ungodly person has died. And in faith, through prayer, fasting, contemplation and learning, seek the new life in Christ more fervently and focused than before. This is why Ash Wednesday prepares us for a time of humble repentance for our own sins, and for that of our congregation, our leaders, our denomination, our country.... As such it becomes a time of reconciliation - with God, our neighbour, our family, friends, children... It is a time to make peace with God, man, ourselves and our environment. We receive this peace in Christ Jesus, who suffered and died to set us free.

It is a season to listen carefully to what God says to us about our lives and to look carefully to the needs of those to whom we should be a neighbour!

On Ash Wednesday we get into the frame of mind, into the right attitude, to desire the death of sinful life and the resurrection of God glorifying life! On Ash Wednesday, at the Table of our Lord, we see and taste that God is good in that One died for all, that we may live for Him! On Ash Wednesday many Christians will also wish to “give up something for Lent”, in order to encourage the discipline that will lead to a closer walk with Christ, repentance and to desire the fullness of Christ’s resurrected life!

2 Cor 7:10: Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.

Ash Wednesday starts the “fasting” of Lent on the right foot: we realise how badly we need God, yes, how hungry and thirsty we are for Jesus, our Saviour!