

## **ASH WEDNESDAY GUIDE FOR PARENTS**

Ash Wednesday is the first day of the season of Lent. It is the Wednesday exactly 46 days before Easter Sunday. Ash Wednesday gets its name from a ritual in which a priest or pastor dips their finger in ashes and draws them on the foreheads of congregation members saying, “Repent and believe the good news of the gospel” or “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

The ashes are traditionally made by burning the palm branches from the previous year’s Palm Sunday. Often, the ash is mixed with oil so that, when the priest puts the mark of the cross on the believer’s forehead, the ash is sure to stay visible for the whole day. This ritual marks the beginning of Lent and is a powerful reminder that life is fleeting, that each day is precious and valuable. The ashes are also a symbol of repentance or turning away from sin, which can be defined as that which separates us from God.

It can feel heavy and somber to remind children of their eventual deaths (which is the heart of what Ash Wednesday teaches). When we speak about the fragility of life and our eventual death in plain terms, with frank language, we do our children a great service. Rather than treating death as taboo or off-limits, we open the door to conversation and a rich spiritual practice wherein death, though certainly tragic and sad most of the time, is a normal and expected part of life. For more information here are some helpful articles: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/babies/202005/talking-young-children-about-death> ;

<https://www.hillsidememorial.org/pdfs/Answering%20Children's%20Questions%20About%20Death.pdf>

### **I believe Ash Wednesday provides an incredible teaching moment for kids that:**

- During Lent we are provided an opportunity to stop filling our lives with things that bring temporary happiness and make more room for Jesus
- Life is a treasure (children are true reminders of this themselves)
- The word “repent” does not have to be a scary, confusing word, rather it reminds us how we can stay closer to God by turning towards the things that keep us closer in relationship with God and away from the things that may separate us from God’s incredible love.

**Activity:** Before or after you receive ashes, consider making a list with two columns. In one column write, “Things I’d like to turn away from.” In the other column write, “Things I’d like to turn toward.” Look at each of these two lists and ponder these things. This activity can be individual or communal, shared out loud or quiet.

### **Bury the Halleluiah**

In some Christian traditions, people don’t say the word Halleluiah (which is a happy word to praise God) until the day of Easter. The idea is to bottle up all our exuberance and then let it out on Easter Sunday morning in an eruption of praise.

A way to come at this with kids is to have them color a sheet with the word Halleluiah on it (or maybe create a collage with all kinds of happy praises to God) and then take the sheet, fold it and hide it somewhere or keep it in a special box until Easter Sunday. On Easter morning, when we celebrate Jesus rising from the grave, take it out and shout it together!

### **A Prayer for Marking the Season**

**God, on this Ash Wednesday, this first day of Lent, we mark the beginning of our journey to Easter. We ask you to be with us as we learn about you in these 46 days. May this be a holy time in our family and in our lives. Amen.**



## SUPPLIES

- Some bits of clay for each person
- Some type of cutting instrument for shaping the figures (plastic knife is provided)

## Wonder about what makes us unique

We are not cut out by God according to a pattern, but each of us is molded in a special way that only clay can express. When it is still moist it is incredibly easy to change and shape. Even if you have a flat cut out figure, try moving a hand or turning the head a bit before it dries. Without much thought at all, individuals start to come alive from the clay. This tells us that God created our very *individual* personalities, the things that make us each who we are, and far more than just the unique shapes of our bodies. Try asking each other about who each character is and why you think so. Use your imaginations!

# Making Clay Figures

The clay will air dry so keep it in the bag till ready to use. This reminds us that we are made from the dust of the earth and given life by God's spirit dwelling in us.

1. Pound or roll the clay flat, a half inch to quarter inch thick (aka pretty thick).



2. Use the knife to block out a figure, then shape with fingers. Figure will be the size of a lego person.



3. Stand the figure upright and push down to make the feet bigger. Squash the figure between your fingers to shape. Move the arms into a position you like.



4. You may have enough clay to make more figures but work fast because the clay will start to dry. Standing, let your figures dry for about a day. Then color as you like!

