

ASH WEDNESDAY

On Ash Wednesday ashes are blessed and, if this takes place during Mass, are distributed after the homily of the Mass. The ashes will be ritually washed away in the new waters of the Easter Vigil. These ashes are of branches of the olive, palm or other tree, which have been blessed on Palm Sunday, the previous year. The usual penitential rite is omitted from the beginning of the Mass.

The blessing and distribution of ashes may take place outside of the celebration of Mass. In this case it is appropriate that the rite be preceded by a Liturgy of the Word, using the entry song, the collect, the readings and their chants as in the Mass.

When this liturgy is led by a lay person, ashes which have previously been blessed by a priest or deacon are used. For the readings two or three scripture passages could be proclaimed plus a responsorial psalm, as at Mass for Ash Wednesday or, simply, just one of the readings and a responsorial psalm.

For a suggested lay-led liturgy in booklet form, see pdf below.

On this day other celebrations are not permitted, with the exception of funeral Masses. (An optional introduction to the liturgy is included in this section).

Ash Wednesday, like Good Friday, is a day of Fasting and Abstinence (see 'Fasting and Abstinence Guidelines').