



Ash Wednesday

ANSWER KEY¹

1. How many days are there in Lent?

- 33 40 46
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Lent is 40 days (reminiscent of the 40 days Jesus spent in the desert; the 40 years the Israelites wandered in the desert; and the 40 days during which the Ninevites repented in the story of Jonah). However, if you count backwards from Easter to Ash Wednesday, the count is 46 days. This is because we do not count Sundays, which are always the Lord's Day, symbolic of the Resurrection, and therefore never a day of fasting.

2. Why do we wear ashes on Ash Wednesday?

Ashes are a biblical symbol of mourning and penance. The custom was to fast, wear sackcloth, sit in dust and ashes, and put dust and ashes on one's head. On Ash Wednesday, we recall this custom, as well as the discipline of fasting.

Ashes are also symbolic of death, and remind us of our own mortality. This is important to consider, as it reminds us of our need to repent before this life is over.

3. Why are the ashes placed on the forehead?

In the Bible, a mark on the forehead is a symbol of a person's ownership. By having our foreheads marked with the sign of the Cross, this symbolizes that we belong to Jesus Christ, who died on a cross. Also, the sign of the Cross on our forehead recalls the spiritual mark or seal that is put on a Christian in baptism.

4. Where do the ashes come from?

They are made by burning the palms which have been saved from the previous year's Palm Sunday, and then they are blessed by a priest. Palm Sunday was when the people rejoiced at Jesus' triumphal entrance into Jerusalem, placing palms at his feet as a gesture of reverence and exaltation. They did not realize that He was coming to die for their sins. By using palms from Palm Sunday, we are reminded that we must not only rejoice in Jesus' coming, but also be mindful that our sins made it necessary for Him to die for us to gain our salvation.

5. Lent is a time to turn away from sin and be faithful to the gospel.

¹ For more information, see http://www.ewtn.com/library/ANSWERS/ASH_WED.htm