

Ash Wednesday

Question:

Is Ash Wednesday a holy day of obligation?

Answer:

Despite the often packed churches, you may be surprised to hear that the answer is no! Holy days of obligation commemorate a particular event (such as the birth of Christ at Christmas) or celebrate particular people (such as Mary's Immaculate Conception or the feast of All Saints). Ash Wednesday is a day of penance, fasting, and abstinence to begin the season of Lent. In a sense, it focuses on a *concept* rather than something particular and concrete.

Of course, repentance ought to be reflected in particular, concrete ways! That's one of the reasons that attending Mass on Ash Wednesday is a very good idea. It marks the beginning of a solemn season of penance. Despite all its comparisons to the desert, Lent can be very fruitful for our spiritual growth! Beginning this season with the celebration of Mass and the reception of ashes is a sign of our commitment to God and to spiritual growth.

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