

Ash Wednesday: Many from Region Get Their Ashes in Services

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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ALTON - Ash Wednesday was marked by many congregations throughout the region and an abundance of people returned to work with ashes.

Ash Wednesday gets its name from the placing of repentance ashes on the foreheads of participants to either the words "Repent and believe in the Gospel" or "Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return." Ashes are prepared from burning palm leaves from the previous year's Palm Sunday celebrations.

Ash Wednesday is a Christian holy day of fasting and prayer. Ash Wednesday is observed by Catholics, Anglicans, Lutherans, Methodists, Moravians, Nazarenes, Independent Catholics and well as many from the Reformed faith, and others.

St. Mary's Catholic Church Father Paul Nguyen, OMV, said there is a long tradition of using ashes as the symbolism of a change of heart and rebirth.

"It is an acknowledgment of the truth as healthy pausing of 'where do I stand' in my own growth as a human," he said. "It is, of course, an acknowledgment too that we want to change our lives for the better. It is not a time of major condemnation but acknowledging the opportunity for growth. During Lent, self-denial is a big theme. We realize what leads us to desire things that are bad for us. Controlling those desires are gestures to keep us on track."

Father Nguyen said Lent is a time where the community comes together in the name of Christ.

“Our attendance goes up during Lent,” he said. “I would say Ash Wednesday and Lent crosses denominations and is a period with a theme of gathering together,” he added.