

Ash Wednesday kicks off Lent for students, parishioners

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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Ash Wednesday begins the devotion of Lent and Catholics at St. Mary's Church in Alton turned out in force in a morning Mass to be blessed.

St. Mary's Grade School children also received ashes one by one on Wednesday. The church was filled with a mixture of school children and adults.

For Father John Wykes, OMV, it was a special time delivering ashes to parishioners and the children. He was a priest at St. Mary's from 1996-2003. Wykes then spent 11 years in Boston before returning back to St. Mary's last October.

"I love it here," he said of returning to St. Mary's. "The people are wonderful here."

Wykes said Ash Wednesday is a day for people to think of their own mortality.

"It gives us a healthy perspective," he said. "It is the first day of Lent. We are fasting today; we are only supposed to have one meal and abstaining from meat. We also abstain from meat every Friday."



The earliest descriptions of Ash Wednesday are found in Anglo-Saxon writings 955-1020. In most Ash Wednesday observances, Christians are asked to the altar to receive ashes on their forehead. The pastor applies ashes in the shape of the cross on the forehead of the recipients. The majority of people who receive ashes leave them on their forehead, as Wykes said as a reminder of everyone's own mortality.

The St. Mary's priest said Ash Wednesday draws interest of the children and it is a fun Mass for them.

“The kids want to compare and see who has the biggest ash,” he said. “I catered the homily more to that age today. I think this is great for kids.”



