

From Beads to Ashes and Beyond....

In just a few days our sanctuary will be filled to capacity, and the live-streamers will be aplenty, as we rock with the amazing jazz sounds of the Funky Dawgz. We'll be tossing beads into the air, singing about the saints marchin' in, and then enjoying some delicious pancakes after. It will be as close to a Bourbon Street Mardi Gras celebration as we can get in a venerable sanctuary on Tolland Green.

Mardi Gras, as you may know, literally means "Fat Tuesday." When it originated thousands of years ago, the idea was to feast on all the rich and fattening foods—meat, eggs, milk, lard, cheese, and the like—to make sure that they were out of your home before the fasting season of Lent began. Today people often celebrate with candy, pancakes, sweets, and other decadent treats.

This was important act because in the early church Lent was the most intense time of preparation leading up to the baptisms that would often occur on Easter morning (since baptism is like a resurrection—dying to the old self and rising to the new). So candidates would fast, pray, read their scriptures, and reflect on Jesus' life, death and resurrection as a way to get ready for this important step in their faith journey.

Today we mark the beginning of that journey with Ash Wednesday. The ashes come from the burned palms of prior Palm Sunday celebrations and are often imposed on a person's forehead or hand with the line "from dust you came and to dust you shall return." The ashes, then, become a tangible reminder of our mortality and thus set the tone for the most penitential season of the year.

Many people today observe the season of Lent by being more intentional about reading scripture, giving up something in order to spend more time doing for others or being in prayer, and others will even "take something on"—like a good deed a day—as a way to deepen their journey through the 40 non-Sunday days of Lent. (Fun fact: Sundays don't count in Lent as every Sunday is a feast day, not a fast day—so if you're fasting from something in Lent, every Sunday you get a reprieve!)

This year, as we mark this journey from beads to ashes and beyond, we will be focusing on the theme of "letting go." We hope that you will use this time to be intentional about letting go of the things in your life that are weighing you down, causing you stress, doing harm to you or others, or are just not helping to make your life and faith the best they can be. We hope that being intentional in this way might make your journey to the cross a little more meaningful.

So join us—in person or online—as we mark this season together. Toss beads with us on Mardi Gras, feel the ashes on your head a few days later, and then pause to mark Jesus' Last Supper and death on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, before celebrating in the joy that lies beyond on Easter Sunday.

You might just find, by letting go over these next six weeks, that you've received something pretty special indeed.