

Hard to believe I'm on the eve of another Ash Wednesday when it seems just the other day I was ringing in 2011. Time's flying! And here I am again anticipating one of my favorite days of the year. Tomorrow morning during Mass I'll receive the sacred ashes that for me mark the time to revamp my faith and my life in general. This time, more than any other, makes clear to me how much I need to lighten my soul and how much some parts of my life need changing. It takes some slowing down and listening to the cries of my imperfect inner spirit, but if I give myself to it, I know this can be a season of grace for me. It can give me the boost I need to get through the months ahead with hope and determination. And so I'm ready.

Ready and eager to go through the motions of Lent.

As called for, I plan on giving up something and/or taking something on, and on praying more than usual. I expect that there will be some fasting involved too, as well as the seeking and giving of forgiveness. But more importantly, I use this time to consider and measure some aspects of my life — family, work, politics, values, and desires — against the model set forth by my Savior. Ay, that right there is an eye opener, can I tell you? This process typically leaves me brow-raised and saying, "Ugh! And I thought I was doing so well!" Uh huh. In the past I've felt frustrated when my efforts have fallen short and I've failed in this regard, because it's difficult to maintain such level of goodness. So I try to make myself feel better by remembering that God doesn't expect perfection from me, He just plants the thought, throws the bait, and hopes I bite. Lent is a time for me to try again, thank goodness. I hope it is for you as well.

Tomorrow, ashes will mark many of us, either all day long or just for a little while. That's a very personal choice. For me, those ashes will mark not only my forehead, but also my heart, and remind me of my mortality and need for deeper conversion. *That*, my friends, doesn't happen every day. This cross of ashes is enlightening, and its effects on me intoxicating. How it brings me to my knees as the sinner that I am, and raises me up at the thought of His forgiveness, all in the same breath. So I will wear that smudge faithfully…and humbly. Yes, strange looks, comments, questions, and all: "You have dirt on your forehead, oh no, wait,

are those ashes? Is it Ash Wednesday?" No matter, I'll wear them not out of ritual or to show off, but because I crave their message, what they say to me when I look in the mirror or feel them crinkling on my skin: "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return." And because this sacramental, to me, is like a drug; just the perfect dose I need to start me off and keep me going.

Yes, I want to be marked by those ashes. That mark that will remind me, and tell others: This is me. This is me on Christ. Any questions?
A blessed Lent to all of you. +

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