

Ash Wednesday 2026 “More Urgency Less Meh”

Bishop Frank Schuster

Peace be with you. Here we are at last. Ash Wednesday. If we gave up on our New Year’s resolution already, we could give it another go. Meh. However, here is a better idea. If we have been getting lax in our spiritual journey lately, this is a great time to jump start our faith life. I say that because I believe the greatest spiritual impoverishment in our world today can be summarized by the word “meh”. There are so many baptized out there in our culture who can be like, “meh” when it comes to their faith journey. Sometimes that person is staring at us in the mirror. The Church can proclaim Jesus as our savior all we want, but why would someone seek a savior if they do not feel like they need saving in the first place. As such, there is no urgency. If I don’t feel like I need to be saved, then why worry about a savior, especially when there is game on. Don’t get me wrong. I love sports...before mass or after mass, just not in place of mass, which, let’s be honest, happens a lot in our culture...because there is no sense of urgency.

However, if Ash Wednesday says anything to us at all, it says with a thumb of ash into your forehead, “Guess what. You do need a savior friend. Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return.” Think about what that smudge of ash with those words attached are saying. Yes. Every year at around this time, Ash Wednesday comes at us like a smack to the head reminding us that we are sinners who cannot save ourselves and that we do not have all the time in the world to turn it around. It is time for more urgency and less “meh” in our lives. Clearly Joel in our first reading is trying to instill that same sense of urgency to the Jews of his day. When it came time for them to repent of their sins, he doesn’t say, “Oh, let’s get around to it when we can”. He says, “Blow the trumpet in Zion! Proclaim a fast, call an assembly; Gather the people, notify the congregation; Assemble the elders, gather the children.” Basically, he is telling the people he is ministering to get moving. The Ash Wednesday liturgy tries to shake us in the same way. We should not be putting off to tomorrow what we should be doing today in atoning for our sins and in our love of God and love of neighbor.

And so, this year, if we have been feeling a little “meh” in our faith lives lately, the good news is Lent offers us the opportunity for our souls to move from a spiritual winter to a spiritual spring. Fun fact, that is what the word Lent originally meant, it meant springtime. Lent can therefore be seen like a spiritual spring training, inspiring us to put forth our best effort to grow in prayer, fasting and almsgiving, with a sense of urgency. Ash Wednesday invites us to enter this time of spiritual spring training strong so we can find ourselves at Easter Sunday even stronger.

To get us there, Pope Leo has given us great advice and food for thought on what we can focus on more intentionally during this year’s season of Lent. Pope Leo says this, “If Lent is a time for listening, *fasting* is a concrete way to prepare ourselves to receive the word of God. Abstaining from food is an ancient ascetic practice that is essential on the path of conversion. Precisely because it involves the body, fasting makes it easier to recognize what we “hunger” for and what we deem necessary for our

sustenance. Moreover, it helps us to identify and order our “appetites,” keeping our hunger and thirst for justice alive and freeing us from complacency. Thus, it teaches us to pray and act responsibly towards our neighbor.” Isn’t that great? He concludes the letter in this way, “Dear friends, let us ask for the grace of a Lent that leads us to greater attentiveness to God and to the least among us. Let us ask for the strength that comes from the type of fasting that also extends to our use of language, so that hurtful words may diminish and give way to a greater space for the voice of others. Let us strive to make our communities places where the cry of those who suffer finds welcome, and listening opens paths towards liberation, making us ready and eager to contribute to building a civilization of love.” In other words, like the prophet Joel, Pope Leo is calling us to jumpstart our faith journey and take our discipleship to a new level.

Yes, my friends, Ash Wednesday is here and we are reminded that the good we should be doing today should not be put off to tomorrow. Lent is a time of spiritual “spring training” for us so to strengthen our discipleship, and up our game in our love of God and neighbor. The liturgy today inspires us to enter this holy season with urgency and less “meh”. If we persevere, we will welcome Easter far more spiritually stronger than when we began. The journey starts today if we follow Jesus with enthusiasm. For the ashes on our foreheads should say one thing loud and clear: we cannot save ourselves, my friends, we can’t. We can’t save ourselves from our sins. We most certainly cannot save ourselves from death. We need Jesus. We need Jesus who alone is the way, the truth, and the life.