



Reflecting on Life's Deep Cleaning

By Pastor Lisa Callaway

The season of Lent begins

on February 21, Ash Wednesday.

Ash Wednesday emphasizes a dual encounter: we confront our own mortality and confess our sin before God within the community of faith. The service focuses on the themes of sin and death in the light of God's redeeming love in Jesus Christ.

The use of ashes as a sign of mortality and repentance has a long history in Jewish and Christian worships, and the Imposition of Ashes can be a powerful nonverbal and experiential way of participating in the call to repentance and reconciliation. It is traditional to save the palm branches from the previous Passion/Palm Sunday service and burn them ahead of time to produce the ashes for this service.

Lent is a season of forty days, not counting Sundays, which begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on Holy Saturday. The season is a preparation for celebrating Easter. Historically, Lent began as a period of fasting and preparation for baptism by converts and then became a time for penance by

all Christians. The penitential spirit of Lent should be tempered with joyful expectation of the Resurrection, because Sundays are always "little Easters."

Somber colors such as purple or ash gray and rough-textured cloth are most appropriate for paraments, stoles and banners. Typically, all shiny objects and, sometimes flowers, are removed from the worship area. Other visuals for Holy Week may include symbols such as perfume, coins, a whip, a crown of thorns, a torn garment, nails, a spear, a sponge, or a broken reed. On Good Friday and Holy Saturday, the church may be stripped bare of visuals. The paraments return to white and Easter lilies often adorn the worship area as a sign of Resurrection on Easter Sunday.

Most of us have engaged in "spring cleaning." That is the time when we do some deep cleaning in the house, clean out the garage, clean out the closets of clothes we no longer wear, and get rid of the things we no longer want or need. We need to "clean up" our lives just as we need to at least yearly deep clean our living spaces. Lent is a good time to reflect on our relationships, our work ethics, our commitments and our

spiritual being and do the necessary "cleaning up" - reorganizing, reconciling, and reconnecting as needed.

Our churches are here to help with that "spring cleaning" of our lives. During Lent, our Christian churches provide opportunities to focus on our relationship with God and with each other. We are encouraged to "take on" the spiritual disciplines of worship, Bible study, and prayer and fasting for God. It may sound kind of "churchy." It may sound kind of heavy and not much fun, but don't let that be a negative thing.

You know the great feeling you get after "spring cleaning" when everything is neat and orderly, when the chaos seems to be replaced with a sense of calm and celebration? That same feeling comes after the long days of Lent, when we can celebrate the glory of Easter.

Being present for all services and opportunities for study and reflection in Lent is the best way to prepare for a glorious Easter celebration. We truly can experience new life!

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