

**Devotion, Week of February 23, 2025**  
**Rev. Jeanne Simpson**

Ash Wednesday is March 5, which begins Lent. Ash Wednesday is a holy day of prayer and fasting in many Western Christian denominations. It is preceded by Shrove Tuesday and marks the first day of Lent, the six weeks of penitence before Easter. Shrove Tuesday is also known as Fat Tuesday, or Mardi Gras, when families often use up all the fat in the house to prepare for 40 days of fasting and repentance during Lent. Many of my Catholic friends serve pancakes that evening to represent this using up of fat and yeast. Years ago, children would go "Shroving" or "Lent-crocking" by knocking on neighbors' doors and singing, and people would go to confession to prepare for Lent.

The day after Fat Tuesday, Christians have traditionally spent the day in prayer and fasting as the 40 day period of Lent begins. It is a solemn day. Ash Wednesday is named after the tradition of marking people's foreheads with ashes in the shape of a cross. The ashes symbolize death and mortality, and are a reminder to repent for sins. The Palm Sunday palms from the previous year are often dried and used to make the ashes for this first day of Lent, as a reminder that the day when people in Jerusalem celebrated Jesus' arrival with palms quickly turned to a week of harassment, arrest, torture, and death for Jesus. It also reminds us of "ashes to ashes." We were born from the earth and we will return to the earth.

As we move toward the Lenten season in a week, I encourage you to spend some time daily in prayer and confession, as we begin the 7 week journey toward the cross.

Yours in Christ,

*Jeanne*