



Ash ceremony

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Ash Wednesday is a Christian holy day of prayer and fasting. It is preceded by Shrove Tuesday and falls on the first day of Lent,[2] the six weeks of penitence before Easter. Ash Wednesday is traditionally observed by Western Christians. Most Latin Rite Roman Catholics observe it, as do some Protestants like Anglicans, Lutherans, Methodists, Nazarenes and Independent Catholics.

Many Christian denominations emphasize fasting, as well as abstinence during the season of Lent and in particular, on its first day, Ash Wednesday. The First Council of Nicaea spoke of Lent as a period of fasting for forty days, in preparation for Eastertide.[6] In many places, Christians historically abstained from food for a whole day until the evening, and at sunset, Western Christians traditionally broke the Lenten fast, which is often known as the Black Fast.[7][8] In India and Pakistan, many Christians continue this practice of fasting until sunset on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, with some fasting in this manner throughout the whole season of Lent.[9]

In the Roman Catholic Church, Ash Wednesday is observed by fasting, abstinence from meat, and repentance – a day of contemplating one's transgressions. On Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, Roman Catholics between the ages of 18 and 59 (whose health enables them to do so) are permitted to consume one full meal, along with two smaller meals, which together should not equal the full meal. Some Catholics will go beyond the minimum obligations put forth by the Church and undertake a complete fast or a bread and water fast until sunset. Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are also days of abstinence from meat (mammals and fowl), as are all Fridays during Lent.[10] Some Roman Catholics continue fasting throughout Lent, as was the Church's traditional requirement,[11] concluding only after the celebration of the Easter Vigil. Where the Ambrosian Rite is observed, the day of fasting and abstinence is postponed to the first Friday in the Ambrosian Lent, nine days later.[12]

A number of Lutheran parishes teach communicants to fast on Ash Wednesday, with some people choosing to continue doing so throughout the entire season of Lent, especially on Good Friday.[13][14][15][16] One Lutheran congregation's A Handbook for the Discipline of Lent recommends that the faithful "Fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday with only one simple meal during the day, usually without meat".[17]

In the Church of England, and throughout much of the Worldwide Anglican Communion, the entire forty days of Lent are designated days of fasting, while the Fridays are also designated as days of abstinence in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer,[18] with the Traditional Saint Augustine's Prayer Book: A Book of Devotion for Members of the Anglican Communion defining "Fasting, usually meaning not more than a light breakfast, one full meal, and one half meal, on the forty days of Lent." [19] The same text defines abstinence as refraining from flesh meat on all Fridays of the