

*Ashes symbolize that I am mortal, made of dust.*

Genesis 2:7 Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.

Genesis 18:27 And Abraham replied, "Now behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord, although I am but dust and ashes."

Psalms 103:14 For He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust.

Liturgy: "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

*Meditating on these verses will help us to nurture humility, and reverence for God as Creator and Life-giver.*

*Ashes symbolize that I am sinful, in need of repentance.*

Job 42:6 Therefore I retract, And I repent in dust עָפָר *aphar* and ashes אֵפֶר *epher*

Deuteronomy 4:24 "For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God."

1 Kings 18:38 Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. (Elijah, Mt.Carmel)

Leviticus 6:10 The priest is to put on his linen robe, and he shall put on undergarments next to his flesh; and he shall take up the ashes to which the fire reduces the burnt offering on the altar and place them beside the altar. 11 Then he shall take off his garments and put on other garments, and carry the ashes outside the camp to a clean place.

Hebrews 13:11 For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy place by the high priest as an offering for sin, are burned outside the camp. 12 Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate. 13 So, let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach.

*Meditating on these verses will help us to sincerely repent, and to recognize Christ as the ultimate sacrifice for sin, and honor Him as Savior.*

*Ashes symbolize an earnest appeal to the Lord for help, a turning and submission to Him.*

Esther 4:1 When Mordecai learned all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city and wailed loudly and bitterly. (upon news that the Jews were to be executed)

Proverbs 25:4 Take away the dross from the silver, And there comes out a vessel for the smith.

Isaiah 1:25 "I will also turn My hand against you, And will smelt away your dross as with lye And will remove all your alloy.

Malachi 3:3 "He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the LORD offerings in righteousness.

2 Timothy 2:20 Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor. 21 Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work. 22 Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

*Meditating on these verses will help us to be receptive to the transforming power of God.*

Receiving the symbol of ashes as a mark upon us helps us to internalize the truth that we are mortal, sinful, creatures. It also is a way for us to express our desire to repent and be forgiven by God. Further, it is an expression of our willingness for God to send His Holy Spirit upon us, to purify us with sanctifying fire and power, to mold us into holy vessels to be used for His honor.

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Examples of the practice among Jews are found in several other books of the Bible, including Numbers 19:9, 19:17, Jonah 3:6, Book of Esther 4:1, and Hebrews 9:13. Jesus is quoted as speaking of the practice in Matthew 11:21 and Luke 10:13: "If the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago (sitting) in sackcloth and ashes."

Christian use of ashes:

Christians continued the practice of using ashes as an external sign of repentance. Tertullian (c. 160 – c. 225) said that confession of sin should be accompanied by lying in sackcloth and ashes.[50] The historian Eusebius (c. 260/265 – 339/340) recounts how a repentant apostate covered himself with ashes when begging Pope Zephyrinus to readmit him to communion.[51]

John W. Fenton writes that "by the end of the 10th century, it was customary in Western Europe (but not yet in Rome) for all the faithful to receive ashes on the first day of the Lenten fast. In 1091, this custom was then ordered by Pope Urban II at the council of Benevento to be extended to the church in Rome.

50.^ Tertullian, *On Repentance*, chapter 9

51.^ *Church History*, book 5, chapter 28:12