

What you need to know about Ash Wednesday in 2018

written by Special to Arkansas Catholic |



What you need to know

- Ash Wednesday comes on a particularly interesting day this year. On Feb. 14 Americans will also be celebrating St. Valentine's Day. This hasn't happened since 1945. Maybe consider celebrating the holiday Feb. 9-10 or on Mardi Gras/St. Valentine's Eve?

- Many Catholics might ask, "Is Ash Wednesday a holy day of obligation?" Ash Wednesday is not a holy day of obligation. The days of obligation all celebrate an event in the life of Jesus or Mary or a person.

Ash Wednesday does not, but it marks the beginning of a season. The day is chosen based on the fact that it's 40 days before Good Friday.

- Ash Wednesday, as well as Good Friday, is a day of fast and abstinence. Fasting allows "one full meal, as well as two smaller meals that together are not equal to a full meal," according to the U.S. bishops. Abstinence means not eating meat. The obligation of abstinence begins at age 14. The law of fasting applies to everyone 18-59 years old.

Posting your #ashtag?

"Ash Wednesday is a day when we literally wear our faith on our forehead," Julianne Stanz

wrote in a column titled "To #ashtag or not to #ashtag on social media."

Ashes symbolize our mortality, need for conversion and the day when we ultimately will be judged by God, noted Stanz, director of new evangelization for the Diocese of Green Bay.

It's a growing trend, especially among younger generations, she observed, to post selfies on social media featuring the ashes along with the hashtag #ashtag.

Before posting, however, "pause to pray," she advised, and "examine your reasons for doing so."