



DIOCESE OF GREAT FALLS-BILLINGS

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March 5, 2025
Ash Wednesday

To the People of God of in Eastern Montana,

Today we begin the journey toward the cross. While we are blessed to know that the story does not end with the cross, but rather in the glory of the resurrection, each year we still pause and recall the salvific actions of Christ through His passion, death and resurrection.

The holy season of Lent provides an opportunity to reflect on the immense love God has for you and for each of His beloved children. These days are also meant for us to evaluate our individual response to that great love. Are we living in ways which honor and respect God? Are we seeing Christ in our brothers and sisters, especially the poor and the lonely? Are we joyful in spirit because of God's love for us?

It is my prayer this Lenten season that all people of Eastern Montana encounter this love of God and open themselves up to God's mercy. To assist in this, I want to take a moment to encourage you to fully enter this holy season, focusing especially on the three pillars of the season: prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

- **Prayer:** Over the six weeks of Lent, I invite you to a deeper prayer life. If you are not a regular daily prayerer, I invite you to simply set aside 5 minutes a day where you can quiet yourself and focus on the presence of God in your life. If you are mature in your prayer life, I encourage you to find ways to go deeper and draw closer to God during these weeks. Remember, while the structured prayers of the Church are beneficial, the spontaneous recognition of God working in your daily life is also prayer and should be nurtured.
- **Fasting:** A frequent question asked is, "What are you giving up for Lent?" Fasting is more than just giving something up. It is the "why" behind what you "give up." We deprive ourselves of something so as to call to mind, in a very small way, the sacrifice made for us. We take our desire for that which we have "given up" and use it to remind ourselves that our true desire is for union with God. While fasting can take many forms, the Church prescribes Ash Wednesday and Good Friday as days of fasting from food. On these days specifically, the faithful who have reached their 18th birthday and who have not yet reached their 60th are permitted one full meal and two smaller meals which do not together equal a full meal. Furthermore, Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, and all Fridays during Lent are days of abstinence from meat for those who have reached their 14th birthday. These are the minimum observances, and those who are able to do more are encouraged to do so.
- **Almsgiving:** There are many ways to give alms. This can be done through financial contributions to your parish, the diocese, and charitable community serving organizations. Personally, I invite you to participate in Operation Ricebowl (<https://www.csricebowl.org>) this year to help those in need. In addition to your financial contributions, I invite you to consider another blessing you have, and that is your time. Ask your pastor if there is something you can do for your parish. Seek out a local community serving organization and volunteer. Or just find extra time to focus on your family life, the domestic church. All of these are giving the alms of your time and will bear great fruit for your spiritual life.

May this Lent be filled with great spiritual renewal for you personally and for our diocese. Know of my prayers in this holy season.

In His peace, joy, and love,

The Most Reverend Jeffrey Fleming
Bishop of Great Falls-Billings