
Service Notes: Explanation of the "Imposition of Ashes"

Tonight's worship includes an ancient Church rite known as *Imposition of Ashes*. It must be stressed, participation is entirely optional. If that is the case, why do we even offer it?



- ✘ We offer it because as a congregation we studied Scripture and found that using ashes as a sign of repentance is a common Biblical theme. (See 2 Samuel 13:19, Esther 4:1, and Jeremiah 6:26 for just a few examples.)
 - ✘ We offer it because the custom is ancient in the Christian Church. Job, a model of faith who lived around 2000BC, used ashes as a sign of repentance. Thus, like the *Aaronic Benediction*, the *Imposition of Ashes* represents the connection of faith that we have with believers of all times.
 - ✘ We offer it because many of our members, who grew up in churches that used *Imposition of Ashes*, asked if we could use it too, since they found the practice a meaningful part of their Lenten preparation.
 - ✘ We offer it because we examined the practice of our sister congregations in the WELS, and found that *Imposition of Ashes* is now quite common. We are not doing anything unique to our circles.
 - ✘ We offer it because the symbolism is rich. The ashes remind us of so much: that because of sin, our bodies will turn to dust; that because of Christ, our guilt has been turned to ash; that repentance, like faith, must be accompanied by fruits.
 - ✘ We offer it because we find the argument "*It's a Catholic practice, and we are Lutheran*" to be logically faulty. Using ashes is a Christian practice that predates the existence of the Roman Catholic Church by 3000 years. Martin Luther wanted to retain all that was good in the liturgy. That is why we did not abandon the *Apostles' Creed*, the *Gloria in Excelsis*, the *Agnus Dei*, etc. These things belong to the entire Christian Church, not to one denomination.
 - ✘ We offer it because we go to great lengths to make it clear that participation is optional, so that no one's conscience is bound. Utilizing the *Imposition of Ashes* does not make one's repentance more real, nor one's faith more sincere. It is like folding your hands in prayer. It is neither good nor bad. It might be a helpful devotional aid for you. If so, then participate. It might mean nothing to you. Then do not participate. In matters where Scripture has not spoken, we enjoy Christian freedom.
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