

*Did you know . . .*

## Ashes For Valentine's Day

Lent starts in 10 days. This year, the sacred Lenten period begins on a more romantic note than has happened since 1945; Ash Wednesday falls on Valentine's Day! And Easter will be on April 1<sup>st</sup>... April Fool's Day...which is strange and exciting at the same time!

Some may breathe a sigh of relief for the excuse to keep Valentine's Day plans a bit low-key. For others, who enjoy a fancy dinner out, or a box of chocolates, they may breathe a sigh of longing to have to wait a day (or celebrate early).

But...thanks to Ash Wednesday... this special day can be celebrated in many unique ways:

- Couples can go get ashes together. Receive the ashes as a couple – if you're married, as "one flesh" – and remember your own penance when you see the ash smudge on your partner's forehead.
- Take on a "couple's penance" for the season of Lent, by sacrificing together. Abstain from the same things, together, receiving support and encouragement from your significant other when you are feeling a bit lazy and unmotivated
- Become Lenten prayer buddies and make it your goal to pray for each other's intentions during the entire season in an even more powerful way.

Undertake acts of charity together, such as visiting a shelter or volunteering for some community service.

Decide on some concrete steps to follow during the season of Lent to strengthen your relationship. Ask the real St. Valentine to assist you with his prayers.

There are so many different and creative ways to celebrate love on Ash Wednesday. Remember that Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of the spiritual season when we prepare ourselves for the mysteries of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Our Lord, which was God's ultimate Act of Love for each one of us. There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends (John 15:13). This Valentine's Day could be a powerful moment when you begin to rediscover the spiritual force of God in your relationship, and to begin living out your love for each other in more Christ-like ways. There is powerful romance in that.

*(Adapted from an article by Fr. Joshan Rodrigues, a priest from the Archdiocese of Bombay, Mumbai, India. He is currently at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome, studying Institutional and Church Communications.)*

*Judy Pearson*

