

Baltimore Catholics prepare for Lent

By Jennifer Williams

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Across the Archdiocese of Baltimore, Catholics are preparing for a Lenten season of prayer, fasting, penance and good works. Ash Wednesday, which marks the start of Lent, falls on Feb. 22. Catholics throughout the archdiocese will attend Masses and receive ashes in the form of a cross on their foreheads, symbolizing that “until dust we shall return” and calling Catholics to a life of humility and sacrifice. The ashes are from blessed palms from the previous year’s Palm Sunday celebration.

On Ash Wednesday and all the Fridays of Lent, Catholics age 14 and over are obliged to abstain from meat. On Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, those 18-59 should fast, which means taking only one full meal (or two smaller meals not to exceed one meal) and only liquids such as milk and fruit juices between meals. The size of the full meal or the two smaller meals depends on the individual’s physical needs. If one’s health may be seriously affected by abstaining or fasting, they are excused from the obligation.

Catholics will be encouraged to reconnect with the sacrament of reconciliation during the six weeks of Lent by participating in “The Light is on for You.” This year, individual parishes will schedule the times when priests will hear confessions. Catholics are encouraged to contact their parish to find out when the sacrament of reconciliation will be available. Individuals may also visit the archdiocesan website at archbalt.org for a list of parishes and the days and times of confession.

Cardinal-designate Edwin F. O’Brien is to be elevated to the College of Cardinals in Rome Feb. 18, and will not return to Baltimore in time to celebrate Ash Wednesday

Mass. Follow catholicreview.org for coverage of his installation to the College of Cardinals.

For many Catholics, and especially school children, their Lenten journey is enhanced by participating in Catholic Relief Services' Operation Rice Bowl. Operation Rice Bowl introduces participants "to countries where poor communities are being strengthened by the work of the Catholic Church through Catholic Relief Services," according to a CRS news release. Participants are encouraged to contribute money into a cardboard rice bowl. Look under the recipes category of the "Life" page of catholicreview.org for meatless recipes from CRS.

In his Lenten message, Pope Benedict XVI called on the faithful to be concerned for one another and "not to remain isolated and indifferent" to the fate of others.

Materialism and a sense of self-sufficiency are obstacles to a Christian life of charity, the pope said.

The annual Lenten message was presented during a Vatican news conference Feb. 7 by Cardinal Robert Sarah, president of the Pontifical Council Cor Unum, the office which handles the pope's charitable giving, along with Monsignor Segundo Tejado Munoz, the council's undersecretary.

CNS contributed to this article.