

## A Holy Lent

If you had come to St Peter's on Wednesday 14 February, you would not have been greeted by red hearts and pink balloons for Valentine's Day! Instead, you could have observed the expression of a different kind of love: a love marked with ashes.

We celebrated Ash Wednesday here. Ash Wednesday - the beginning of Lent. It follows Shrove Tuesday – the day before – which is the day when traditionally pancakes are eaten, to use up the eggs and butter that are not on the table in Lent. Shrove Tuesday is often a day of excess, especially in Europe and Latin America, with Mardi Gras festivals marked by fancy dress, dancing and parades (could be part of the background to NZ's Gay Pride parade).

We are a bit more restrained here! Originally Shrove Tuesday was to do with being shriven – receiving absolution for your sins in preparation for a solemn Ash Wednesday and the coming 6 weeks of Lent.

The rhythms of the church year as we, and many other, liturgically-based churches celebrate them, provide us with the opportunity to engage with different aspects of the Christian story. Lent is a time of reflection and self-observation, as we journey with Christ in to the wilderness, to be refined for ministry and to face the temptations of our soul. One of the prayers in our tradition reads:

*I invite you, therefore, to the observance of a Holy Lent,  
by self-examination and repentance, by prayer, fasting, and self-denial,  
and by reading and meditating on God's holy word.*

In imitating Christ, I wonder if you are planning to observe Lent, and what it is that you might practise...

- ❖ How would it be to fast from busy-ness and endless to do lists?
- ❖ Are you called to prayer: a small pause in the day to draw breath and remember whose you are?
- ❖ Perhaps you are invited to honour your body, noticing its needs for rest and observing the effects of sugar and gluten?
- ❖ Notice your impact on God's earth – in the use of its resources, petrol or plastic...could you deny yourself one of these this Lent?

Whatever you choose to make a part of your Lent, may it be in order to embrace more fully the love of God in your life, and to know the peace of God which passes all understanding.