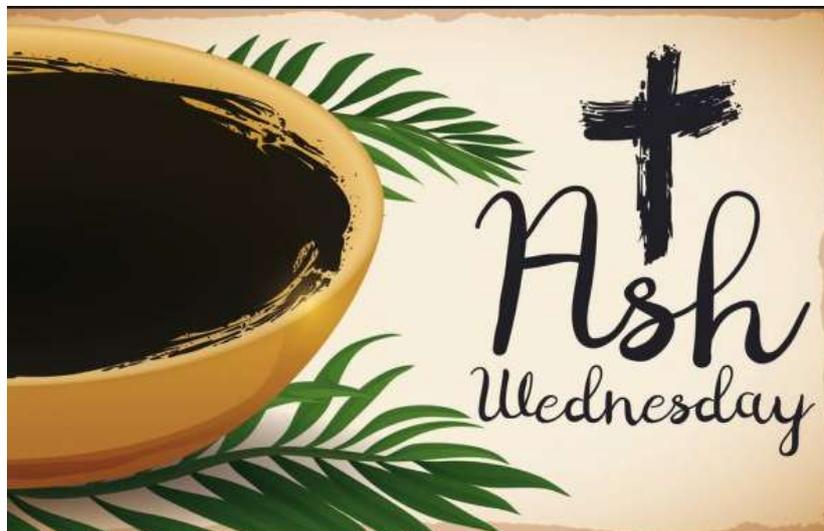


# 'Celebrate Ash Wednesday at Home'

*(A timely news item from The Tablet this week)*



ALMOST A year since the country went into lockdown for the first time, the Church in England and Wales is preparing to celebrate Ash Wednesday under unprecedented circumstances, with Catholics in some parts of the country being urged to stay at home and bless one another with the sign of the cross to mark the beginning of Lent. While churches in England are still open for public worship, Cardinal Vincent Nichols told parishioners in his Diocese of Westminster this week: "Receiving ashes is an outward sign of an inner step, a movement of the heart towards our beloved Lord. This year I invite you to concentrate much more on this inner, spiritual movement than on its outward manifestation in the imposition of ashes." Speaking to churchgoers in London, where the South African variant of the coronavirus has been detected in several boroughs, Cardinal Nichols said: "My suggestion is this: celebrate Ash Wednesday at home, with your family, in the household or 'support bubble' of which you are a part."

In a pastoral letter due to be read out in diocesan churches this weekend, Cardinal Nichols outlined a form for marking the beginning of Lent in the home, starting with a time of prayer: "Bless each other by making the sign of the cross on each other's forehead. Spend some time praying in a way that you know. But please, make this a prayer of your heart for God's mercy upon this world struggling to cope with the terrible pandemic and the devastation it is bringing." He suggested Catholics use one of the traditional blessings for the imposition of ashes on Ash Wednesday, such as "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return" or "Repent, and believe in the Gospel". He likened the practice of blessing one another within the family to the tradition of a parent making the sign of the cross on their child's forehead before sleep, and urged Catholics not to hesitate to do this: "Please do take up this invitation. Open your hearts to the gift of God's presence to support, comfort and strengthen you. This year, it may be best to do this, not by going to church, but by sharing the prayer, the blessing and this moment of dedication within the love of your family and friends."

*(Liz Dodd) [www.thetablet.co.uk](http://www.thetablet.co.uk)*