

They made the call during prayers on Ash Wednesday, which marks the first day of Lent.

BY MONITOR TEAM

Christians across Uganda yesterday joined the global Church in marking the beginning of Lent, a 40-day season of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving that prepares the faithful for Easter.

From major cathedrals to small rural parishes, believers gathered for Ash Wednesday Mass, where ashes were smeared on their foreheads as a sign of repentance and spiritual renewal. Easter will be celebrated on April 5.

In a Lenten message from Pope Leo, delivered by Bishop Robert Muhirwa of Fort Portal Catholic Diocese, the Holy Father urged Christians to embrace a deeper form of conversion by "disarming their language".

"I would like to invite you to a rare, practical, and frequently unappreciated form of abstinence: refraining from words that offend and hurt our neighbor," the message read. "Let us avoid harsh words and judgments, refrain from slander, and cultivate kindness and respect in our families, workplaces, and on social media."

Bishop Muhirwa reminded the faithful that Lent mirrors the 40 days Jesus Christ spent fasting in the wilderness before beginning His public ministry.

"The Church gives us these 40 days to prepare spiritually for the commemoration of the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of our Lord," he said, urging Christians to intensify prayer, participate attentively in Mass, and observe fasting in a spirit of repentance.

Bishop Muhirwa encouraged believers to go beyond abstaining from meat and consider giving up habits that distance them from God, including excessive alcohol consumption. In Mbarara, Archbishop Lambert Bainomugisha called on Christians to reflect on their sins and seek forgiveness.

On Ash Wednesday we are reminded that we are dust and to dust we shall return. This is a period to repent and renew our lives," he said.

At Uganda Martyrs Parish, Rev Fr Francis Kadidi urged Christians to advocate for justice, including the release of political prisoners, and called on the Judiciary to uphold fairness. He also appealed for peace, noting that reconciliation is essential in the aftermath of a tense political season.

Similar messages were echoed across the country. The Bishop of Kabale Diocese, Rt Rev Callist Rubaramira, prayed for a fruitful Lenten season and asked Christians to allow God to renew their faith. The Bishop of Soroti Catholic Diocese, Rt Rev Dr Joseph Eciru Oliach, challenged believers to confront societal evils such as corruption and child sacrifice.

At St Mary Assumpta Ragem Parish in Arua, Fr Thomas Opolot encouraged Christians to fast from gossip and selfishness. At St Peter's Cathedral, Nyakatare, Bishop Dan Zoreka of Kinkizi Diocese tasked Christians to use the Lenten season to evaluate their relationship with Christ and make necessary changes.

In Kalangala District, Fr Martin Naluswa called on believers to dedicate the 40 days to prayer and repentance.

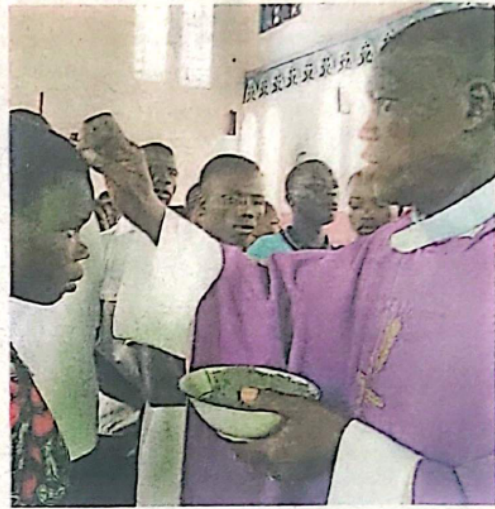


Bishop Robert K Muhirwa of Fort Portal Catholic Diocese marks the forehead of a Christian with ash during Ash Wednesday Mass at Virika Cathedral in Fort Portal City yesterday. PHOTO/ALEX ASHABA

Clergy task faithful on peace as Lent begins



Rev Fr Charles Katongole Kaweesi makes a cross on a baby's forehead using ash at St Peter's Parish in Nsambya, Kampala City, yesterday. PHOTO/GEOFREY MUTUMBA



Fr Robert Ayiko, the curate of Yumbe Catholic Parish, makes a symbol of the cross with ash on the forehead of a Christian in Yumbe District. PHOTO/ROBERT ELEMA

In Apac District, Rev Fr John Bosco Aligi, the Parish Priest of Apac Catholic Parish, urged the faithful to use the Lent period to build peace and love among ourselves, emphasising the importance of speaking with kindness and compassion.

In Kampala, the Capital, at Rubaga Cathedral, the seat of the Catholic Church in Uganda, Kampala Archbishop Paul Ssemogerere condemned the rising crime rates in the country, particularly in the Kampala Metropolitan area.

"Lent is for spiritual renewal where we reflect on our actions, forgive, and

serve others. This is not how the Pearl of Africa should be, with such criminal cases all over media reports, especially in our capital city," he said.

The Archbishop reminded believers to reflect deeply on their actions in both private and public life.

Fr Achilles Mayanja, the administrator at Rubaga Cathedral, called on the faithful to seek moral restoration in the wake of the recently concluded elections.

"The period of elections has shown the decay in people's hearts and rapid moral decline. Some celebrate knowing they did not win truthfully, and this has devastated many youth and has traumatised them in the whole process. We have seen untrustworthy officials announce results different from what is

evident on records known to the people," he said. Across parishes in Kamuli and Luweero, priests urged the faithful to embrace humility, and acts of charity particularly toward the poor and vulnerable.

Compiled by Alex Ashaba, Byomugabi Segujja, Moureen Biira, Longino Muhindo, Yoweri Kaguta, Ismail Bategeka, Felix Warom Okello, Clement Aluma, Robert Elema, Suzan Nanjala, Robert Muhereza, Naume Biira, Denis Edema, Moses Mutaka, Felix Ainebyoona, Julius Byamukama, Fred Wambede, Al-Mahdi Ssenkibirwa, Dan Wandera, Enock Matovu, Antonio Kalyango, Santo Ojok, Sylvia Namagembe & David Walugembe

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DAYS OF FASTING
AND PRAYER