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A person with a cross of ashes on their forehead is pictured in this file photo. (Ahna Ziegler/Unsplash/Creative Commons)



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There are filters that blur "imperfections" in photos and filters that turn lawyers into cats on Zoom.

Now there are filters to help Christians safely display the very visible Ash Wednesday mark on social media.

Many Catholic and other liturgical churches observe Ash Wednesday by smudging ashes on congregants' foreheads as a sign of repentance and a reminder of one's mortality.

That practice presents a problem during a season when health experts fighting COVID-19 have advised people to avoid touching their faces or coming in close proximity to others, and churches have embraced a number of creative solutions, including take-home or drive-thru options for receiving ashes.

In a year when so much of life has been lived virtually, Catholic prayer and meditation app Hallow has also taken the tradition online with an "AshTag" photo filter on both Facebook and Instagram.

The "AshTag" filter overlays a black cross onto users' foreheads in photos, and Hallow is inviting people to post their selfies taken with the filter on Ash Wednesday (Feb. 17) using the hashtag "#AshTag2021."

"What better place to embrace solidarity with the global Church than on social media," declares its website.

The Church of England also has created a similar "Ashes at Home" filter on Instagram.

Ash Wednesday is the beginning of the 40-day penitential season of Lent, during which Christians spiritually prepare for Holy Week, when they remember Jesus' death, and Easter, when they celebrate Jesus' resurrection. For Catholics, those preparations often include prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

In addition to the "AshTag" filter, Hallow also is offering a #Pray40 Lenten challenge on its app, encouraging users to spend time each day in prayer.

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