

Ash Wednesday Service for parishioners at home

Since Biblical times, ashes have been an outward sign of a person's desire to repent of their sins and return to the Lord. Of course, until fairly recently, ashes would have been in every home as the by product of their coal or wood fires. In these days of central heating, very few have access to ashes. Under normal circumstances, we would use the ashes from the previous year's palms. This year we need to be more creative as these will not be readily available for numerous reasons.

If you wish to use ashes, perhaps you could use some dried-out earth from your garden, finely ground charcoal- from your barbeque, or you may have access to ashes from someone's fire. Whatever you chose to use, the important thing is that we have the interior desire to "turn away from sin and believe the Gospel."

Below is a short liturgy you may wish to use on your own, or with your household members.

Begins with making the sign of the cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. All make the sign of the cross and reply:

R. Amen

In the following words, you may wish to prepare those present, if anyone is with you, for the distribution of the ashes.

(My brothers and sisters,) the hour of God's favour draws near, the day of his mercy and of our salvation approaches, when death was destroyed and eternal life began. As I/we begin this season of Lent, (we gather today to) acknowledge that I/we are sinners. As I/we express my/our sorrow, may God be merciful to me/us and restore me/us to his friendship.

OPENING PRAYER

Let us pray.

Father in heaven, the light of your truth bestows sight to the darkness of sinful eyes. May this season of repentance bring us the blessing of your forgiveness and the gift of your light.

Grant this through Christ our Lord.

R. Amen.

Scripture Reading Joel 2:12-18 (JB)

A reading from the prophet Joel.

‘Now, now (is the Lord who speaks), come back to me with all your heart, fasting, weeping, mourning.’ Let your hearts be broken, not your garments torn, turn to the Lord your God again, for he is all tenderness and compassion, slow to anger, rich in graciousness, and ready to relent. Who knows if he will not turn again, will not relent, will not leave a blessing as he passes, oblation and libation for the Lord your God? Sound the trumpet in Zion! Order a fast, proclaim a solemn assembly, call the people together, summon the community, assemble the elders, gather the children, even the infants at the breast. Let the bridegroom leave his bedroom and the bride her alcove. Between vestibule and altar let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, lament. Let them say, ‘Spare your people, Lord! Do not make your heritage a thing of shame, a byword for the nations. Why should it be said among the 2 nations, ‘Where is their God?’” Then the Lord, jealous on behalf of his land, took pity on his people.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.



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Psalm 50:3-6, 12-14, 17 (Grail)

Response: Have mercy on us, O Lord, for we have sinned.

Have mercy on me, God, in your kindness;
in your compassion blot out my offense.
O wash me more and more from my guilt
and cleanse me from my sin.

Response: Have mercy on us, O Lord, for we have sinned.

My offences truly I know them;
my sin is always before me
Against you, you alone, have I sinned;
what is evil in your sight I have done.

Response: Have mercy on us, O Lord, for we have sinned.

A pure heart create for me, O God,
put a steadfast spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from your presence,
nor deprive me of your Holy Spirit.

Response: Have mercy on us, O Lord, for we have sinned.

Give me again the joy of your help;
with a spirit of fervour sustain me,
O Lord, open my lips
and my mouth shall declare your praise.

Response: Have mercy on us, O Lord, for we have sinned.

The Gospel Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18 (JB)

Praise to you, O Christ, king of eternal glory!
A pure heart create for me, O God,
and give me again the joy of your help.
Praise to you, O Christ, king of eternal glory!

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

A reading from the holy Gospel + according to Matthew.

Jesus said to his disciples, 'Be careful not to parade your good deeds before men to attract their notice; by doing this you will lose all reward from your Father in heaven. So, when you give alms, do not have it trumpeted before you; this is what the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets to win men's admiration. I tell you solemnly, they have had their reward. But when you give alms, your left hand must not know what your right is doing; your almsgiving must be secret, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you. And when you pray, do not imitate the hypocrites: they love to say their prayers standing up in the synagogues and at the street corners for people to see them; I tell you solemnly, they have had their reward. But when you pray, go to your private room and, when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in that secret place, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you. When you fast do not put on a gloomy look as the hypocrites do: they pull long faces to let men know they are fasting. I tell you solemnly, they have had their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that no one will know you are fasting except your Father who sees all that is done in secret; and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you.'

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

DISTRIBUTION OF BLESSED ASHES

Ashes will not be available this year. You may wish to use some soil from your garden- dry it out for a few days before use, or ground up charcoal, or even some ash if you have an open fire at home. Your own parish priest may extend the blessing of ashes to all homes from the Mass he celebrates on Ash Wednesday. You may wish to create a small altar or focus for your prayer. Perhaps you could use a small table with a cloth, place a crucifix on the table and a candle if you have one.

Prayer:

May these ashes remind us of God's invitation to us to repent from sin and to follow him.
We are reminded of the words of the prophet Daniel:

Daniel turned to the Lord God, pleading in earnest prayer,
With fasting, sackcloth, and ashes.

O Lord, we are shamefaced, like our kings, our princes,
and our fathers, for having sinned against you.

But yours, O Lord, our God are compassion and forgiveness! Dan 9:3,8-9

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The ashes are placed on the crown of the head of each person. This is to reduce the risk of transmission, and has been ordered by the Vatican for this year. If you are giving yourself ashes, then you may wish to place them on your forehead as per tradition. If you are placing the ashes on your own head, you may wish to say:

“May I turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel.”

Or

Sprinkling the ashes on top of someone else’s head:

“Turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel “

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Lord, we pray that church leaders will show us the way to repentance and reconciliation by their example. Lord hear us.

All: Lord, graciously hear us.

Lord, we pray that our little acts of self-denial will help us to unite with the suffering of others. Lord hear us.

All: Lord, graciously hear us.

The Our Father

now, summing up all your prayers in the words Our Lord taught us let us pray.

Our Father...

Closing Prayer:

God, source of life, you know our desires and our weakness.

Renew our hearts and our lives that we may live as your people.

Help us to reach out to others and to share your love with all people.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen

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