

ASH WEDNESDAY PRAYER SERVICE

Virtue Link: Faith, Hope, Love, Justice, Temperance, Fortitude

Catholic Character Themes: Community, Compassion, Discipleship, Reverence, Solidarity

Introduction

The Hebrew People of the Old Testament understood that human life was short, and that all persons eventually would become sick, grow old and die. They knew their lives were like the grass that grew in the fields and then faded away. They remembered that they were children of Adam and Eve. God made Adam and Eve from the dust of the earth and breathed His own life into them, and cared for them like a good Father, holding them in the palm of His hand. When they lived by God's laws, they knew they would always be happy. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God, their life wasn't easy. They had to work hard, and eventually they died.

When the Hebrews disobeyed God, persons called *prophets* called them to repent, to turn away from their sin, and to have a *change of heart*. The people would put on clothes made from rough cloth, cover their heads with ashes; they would *fast* and pray for God's mercy.

Ash Wednesday

Ash Wednesday begins our forty day season of Lent that leads to Easter. On Ash Wednesday, we come together like the people of the Old Testament to remind ourselves that we don't always follow God's ways and need to ask God for His mercy and forgiveness. Like God's people in the time of the prophets, we wear ashes to show that we want to turn away from whatever keeps us from God, and to have a *change of heart*, so that we can live in right relationship with God and each other.

On Ash Wednesday, the priest or person giving out ashes rubs them on our forehead in the shape of a cross while saying:

Repent and believe in the Gospel

Or

Turn away from sin and believe in the Gospel

For Catholics, Ash Wednesday is also a day of fasting and abstaining from meat. Fasting reminds us that food alone cannot make us happy. We must also be fed with prayer, with God's Word and by meeting Jesus in the Sacraments, especially the Reconciliation and Eucharist (the Mass). The small sacrifices we make during Lent make room in our hearts to welcome the risen Jesus at Easter.

Let us begin our Ash Wednesday prayer service by singing...
(Suggested: *Come and Journey* No. 476 CBW III)

LEADER:

Let us begin our prayer marked by the sign of our faith:
In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen

Opening Prayer:

God our Father, as we begin this holy season of Lent, help us to see that your merciful love is with us always, even when we wander far from you. We ask you to change our hearts, that we might become better followers of your Son Jesus. With the help of your

grace, may our prayers and sacrifices over the next forty days lead us to welcome Him in each other, in the poor, sick and lonely so that together, we can greet Him as one family at Easter. We make this prayer to you in Jesus' name. Amen.

Penitential Rite:

LEADER:

Coming together as God's children, we recognize our sin in God's merciful presence.

ALL:

I confess to almighty God,
And to you my brothers and sisters
That I have sinned through my own fault,
In my thoughts, and in my words
In what I have done and in what I have failed to do.
And I ask blessed Mary, ever-virgin,
All the angels and saints,
And you, my brothers and sisters,
To pray for me to the Lord, our God.

LEADER:

May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life.

All: Amen.

LEADER: Let us be attentive to God's Word:

First Reading :

(Joel 2, 12-14)

A reading from the prophet Joel:

"But even now," says the Lord,

"Repent sincerely and return to me with fasting and weeping and mourning.

Let your broken heart show your sorrow; tearing your clothes is not enough.

Come back to the Lord your God.

He is kind and full of mercy;

He is patient and keeps his promise;

He is always ready to forgive and not punish."

(pause)

The Word of the Lord

All: Thanks be to God.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM (Psalm 51)

The Response to the psalm is "Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned."

ALL: Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.

Be merciful to me, O God,
Because of your constant love.
Because of your great mercy, wipe away my sins!
Wash away all my evil,
And make me clean from my sin.

R. Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.

I recognize my faults;
I am always conscious of my sins.
I have sinned against you –only against you-
And have done what is wrong in your sight.

R. Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.

Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And put a new and right spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from your presence,
And do not take your holy spirit from me.

R. Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.

Give me again the joy of your salvation,
And make me willing to obey you.
O Lord, open my lips,
And my mouth will declare your praise. **R**

R. Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.

GOSPEL (Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18)

A reading from the holy gospel according to Matthew.

Jesus said to his disciples, “Make certain you do not perform your religious duties in public so that people will see what you do. If you do these things publicly, you will not have any reward from your Father in heaven.

“So when you give something to a needy person, do not make a big show of it, as the hypocrites do in the houses of worship and on the streets. They do it so that people will praise them. I assure you, they have already been paid in full. But when you help a needy person, do it in such a way that even your closest friend will not know about it. Then it will be a private matter. And your Father, who sees what you do in private, will reward you.

“When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites! They love to stand up and pray in the houses of worship and on the street corners, so that everyone will see them. I assure

you, they have already been paid in full. But when you pray, go to your room, close the door, and pray to your Father, who is unseen. And your Father, who sees what you do in private, will reward you.

“And whenever you fast, do not put on a sad face as the hypocrites do. They neglect their appearance so that everyone will see that they are fasting. I assure you, they have already been paid in full. When you go without food, wash your face, and comb your hair, so that others cannot know that you are fasting –only your Father, who is unseen, will know. And your Father, who sees what you do in private, will reward you.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

PAUSE FOR A MOMENT OF SILENT REFLECTION

BLESSING OF ASHES:

[Note: Unless directed otherwise by the Pastor, it is best to omit this section, so that students and staff receive ashes at the parish liturgical celebration.]

LEADER: Now we will ask God to bless our ashes. We will receive them on our foreheads as a sign that we want to turn away from sin, and to follow Jesus

Blessing Prayer:

Lord our God,
We ask you to bless these ashes,
Symbol of our desire
To turn away from sin,
And to follow Jesus your Son
May your Holy Spirit give us the strength
To pray, do good works and make sacrifices
This holy season of Lent,
As we joyfully wait to meet Jesus,
Risen from the dead,
At Easter.
We make this prayer to you in the name of
Jesus, our Lord.

All: Amen

Distribution of Ashes:

LEADER: Please join in singing... (sugg. *Ashes No. 340 Glory & Praise*)
Acting minister rubs ashes on foreheads of members of the assembly saying:
“Turn away from sin and believe in the Gospel”
or
“Repent and believe in the Gospel”

Prayer of the Faithful:

1. Let us pray for the Church. That all God’s people will remember their lonely, poor and forgotten brothers and sisters, by sharing their food, money and time with them this Lent and always. We pray to the Lord.

Lord, hear our prayer.

2. Let us pray for the leaders of the Church, especially our bishop and pastors. May God give them the wisdom to guide all of us to be come holy in following Jesus. We pray to the Lord.

Lord, hear our prayer.

3. Let us pray for world peace. That those who lead our countries may do what is best for all the peoples of the world, especially the poor and needy, when they make important decisions. We pray to the Lord.

Lord, hear our prayer.

4. Let us pray for the poor and suffering in our world. May they find help, hope and comfort in the good works and sharing of God’s people this Lent.

Lord, hear our prayer.

5. Let us pray for our parents. That God may help them to guide us always in what is right and true. We pray to the Lord.

Lord, Hear our prayer.

6. Let us pray for our teachers, EAs secretaries, caretakers and principal. That they may continue to lead us by their good example as they follow Jesus. We pray to the Lord.

Lord, Hear our prayer.

7. Let us pray for each other. That God may give us His strength to be kind to pray, to share and to be kind to one another this Lent. We pray to the Lord.

Lord, hear our prayer.

LEADER: Let us join all the prayers we have spoken and the prayers in our hearts with the prayer of Jesus, using the words He gave us: *Our Father...*

Final Prayer:

God our Father,
You formed us from the dust of the earth
And brought us to new life in Christ
Through the waters of Baptism.
We ask you to change our hearts
As we journey through these forty days of Lent.
Help us to see Jesus in everyone we meet,
And to serve him in all persons,
Especially the poor, the sick and the lonely.
By your grace, may our prayers and sacrifices this Lent
Help us grow closer to each another and to you,
As one family in Jesus.
We make this prayer to you in His name.
Amen.,

LEADER: And may Almighty God bless us: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Let us go in the peace of Christ.

ALL: Thanks be to God.

LEADER: Please join in our final song.... (Suggested – *Come and Journey* Last 3 Verses No. 476 CBW III)