

LENT: A TIME FOR JUSTICE

An Ash Wednesday Prayer Service

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

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

INTRODUCTION

Lent is a time when we prepare as a faith community to meet the risen Christ at Easter. It is a time for us to turn away from what keeps us from living the Gospel, and to remind ourselves that we are called to lives rooted in *justice*. To be *just* in the biblical sense is to be in *right relationship* with God and neighbour. As we prepare to meet Christ in his resurrected glory, we *pray* for a change of heart towards greater love of God and neighbour; we *fast* from self-indulgence and indifference to the poor and suffering; and finally, we *share* our food, our wealth and our time with others in need.

Over these 40 days, may the Holy Spirit give us the strength to *act justly*, the courage to *love tenderly* and the faith to *walk humbly with our God*, that we might rejoice in the triumph of God's justice in Jesus at Easter.

OPENING SONG: (Sugg. *Come and Journey* No. 477 CBW III)

OPENING PRAYER

Let us pray. Lord, as we begin this holy season of Lent, grant us a change of heart that we might turn away from sin and follow your Son's Gospel. We ask you to fill us with a hunger for what is just. By your grace, may our lives become more deeply rooted in prayer, self-sacrifice and a willingness to share, in order that your Reign of justice might more fully flourish in our midst, when we greet your risen Son at Easter. We ask you this, through Christ our Lord.

READING : (JOEL 2:12-18)

A reading from the book of the prophet Joel:

"Even now," says the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; rend your hearts and not your clothing.

"Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing."

Who knows whether the Lord will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him: a grain offering and a drink offering to be presented to the Lord, your God?

Blow the trumpet in Zion ; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly; gather the people. Sanctify the congregation; assemble the aged; gather the children, even infants at the breast. Let the bridegroom leave his room, and the bride her canopy.

Between the vestibule and the altar let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep. Let them say, "Spare your people, O Lord, and do not make your heritage a mockery, a byword among the nations. Why should it be said among the peoples, 'Where is their God?'"

Then the Lord became jealous for his land, and had pity on his people.

(Pause)

The word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM (Psalm 51)

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

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love;
According to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
And cleanse me from my sin. **R**

For I know my transgressions,
And my sin is ever before me.
Against you, you alone, have I sinned.
And done what is evil in your sight. **R**

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

Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
And sustain in me a willing spirit.
O Lord, open my lips,
And my mouth will declare your praise. **R**

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

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.

Jesus said to the disciples, "Beware of practising your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

"So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

"And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

"And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show other that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash you face, so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you."
(Pause)

The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

SHORT PAUSE FOR REFLECTION

BLESSING AND DISTRIBUTION 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.]

Lord our God,
 We ask you to bless these ashes:
 Symbol of our heartfelt desire
 To turn away from sin
 And to live by the Gospel.
 May they remind us that
 United with you we can live justly,
 And that apart from you, we can do nothing.
 We make this prayer to you in Jesus' name.

[Suggested Song: *Ashes* (No. 340 G&P)]

*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

Having been fed by God's Word, let us now bring our prayers before the Lord. The response to our petitions is: *Renew our Hearts, O Lord.*

1. Let us pray for the Church throughout the world. That all the baptized, charged with being *salt* and *light* for the sake of the Gospel, might make the Church's saving presence more visible to the lonely and forgotten among us this Lent through sharing of goods and generous self-giving.
All: *Renew our Hearts, O Lord.*
2. Let us pray for our religious leaders and parish priests. May their Lenten observances bring renewal of spirit and clarity of vision to their service of the Gospel. We pray to the Lord.
All: *Renew our Hearts, O Lord.*
3. Let us pray for our political leaders. May their efforts to foster global peace and justice be rooted in a change of heart that turns away from violence, and seeks the good of the poor, the powerless and defenseless of our world.
All: *Renew our Hearts, O Lord.*
4. Let us pray for all who suffer due to a lack of justice in our world. May they find hope and comfort in Christians' increased actions to improve the common good in this Lenten season.
All: *Renew our Hearts, O Lord.*
5. Let us pray for all persons involved in Catholic education in Ontario . That during this holy season of Lent, we might more deeply appreciate the gift of our educational faith communities, rooted and celebrated in the abiding presence of the crucified and risen Jesus. We pray to the Lord.
All: *Renew our Hearts, O Lord.*

6. Let us pray for ourselves, that we might be strengthened to look past the doubts and fears which tempt us to abandon our Lenten efforts to live justly as God's people. We pray to the Lord.

All: *Renew our Hearts, O Lord.*

Leader: Let us gather these intentions and those held in the silence of our hearts, uniting them with the prayer of Jesus, using the words he gave us: *Our Father...*

CLOSING PRAYER

Let us pray:

Merciful God,

You created us from the dust of the earth,

And breathed your own life into our very being.

You recreated us in Christ through the waters of Baptism,

That we might share in his fullness of life.

As we enter these forty days,

May our fasting strengthen us to seek your justice,

May our prayer lead us to become makers of peace,

And may our sharing quicken the seeds of your Reign,

Present in all human hearts, and growing in mystery,

As we await with joyful anticipation, the resurrection of Jesus your Son.

We make this prayer to you in his name.

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

Let us go in the peace of Christ.

ALL: Thanks be to God.

CLOSING SONG: (Sugg. *Come and Journey* –last 3 verses or *Turn to Me* No. 432
Glory and Praise)