

CONCERNING ASH WEDNESDAY

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of the season of Lent: a time of penitence, fasting, and prayer, in preparation for the great feast of the resurrection.

The season of Lent began in the early days of the Church as a time of preparation for those seeking to be baptized at the Easter Vigil. The forty days refer to our Lord's time of fasting in the wilderness; and since Sundays are never fast days, Ash Wednesday is the beginning of the Lenten Fast.

Throughout the Old Testament, ashes are used as a sign of sorrow and repentance, and Christians have traditionally used ashes to indicate sorrow for our own sin, and as a reminder that the wages of sin is death (ROMANS 6:23). Like Adam and Eve, we have disobeyed and rebelled against God, and are under the same judgment, "you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (GENESIS 3:19).

But as we are marked with ashes in the same manner that we were signed with the Cross in Baptism, we are also reminded of the life we share in Jesus Christ, the second Adam (ROMANS 5:17, 6:4). It is in this sure hope that we begin the journey of these forty days, that by hearing and answering our Savior's call to repent, we may enter fully into the joyful celebration of his resurrection.

A S H W E D N E S D A Y

The Ministers may enter in silence, or a hymn, psalm, or anthem may be sung.

The People stand, and the Officiant says

Bless the Lord who forgiveth all our sins.

People **His mercy endureth for ever.**

The Officiant invites the People to the observance of a holy Lent, either here or following the sermon, saying

Dearly beloved, the first Christians observed with great devotion the days of our Lord's passion and resurrection, and it became the custom of the Church to prepare for the same by a season of penitence and fasting. This season of Lent provided a time in which converts to the faith were prepared for holy Baptism. It was also a time when such persons as had, by reason of notorious sins, been separated from the body of the faithful, were reconciled and restored to the fellowship of the Church by penitence and forgiveness. Thereby the whole Congregation was put in mind of the message of pardon and absolution contained in the Gospel of our Savior, and of the need which all Christians continually have of a renewal of their repentance and faith.

I invite you, therefore, in the name of the Church, to the observance of a holy Lent: by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and alms-giving; and by reading and meditating on God's holy Word.

And to make a right beginning, let us now pray for grace, that we may faithfully keep this Lent.

The Officiant and people kneel. A period of silent prayer follows.

The Officiant then says

Almighty and everlasting God, who hatest nothing that thou hast made and dost forgive the sins of all them that are penitent; Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins, and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of thee, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. **Amen.**

THE LESSONS

The following Lessons are read. The Psalm may be said or sung.

JOEL 2:1-2, 12-17 *or* ISAIAH 58:1-12

PSALM 103 *or* 103:8-14

2 CORINTHIANS 5:20—6:10

MATTHEW 6:1-6, 16-21

If Communion is to follow, all stand for the Gospel, and the Deacon or Priest reads it, first saying

The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according
to _____.

People **Glory be to thee, Lord Christ.**

After the Gospel, the Reader says

The Gospel of the Lord.
People Praise be to thee, Lord Christ.

THE SERMON

PENITENTIAL PSALM AND IMPOSITION OF ASHES

The Officiant says

Let us now call to mind our sin and the infinite mercy of God.

If ashes are to be imposed, the Officiant says

Almighty God, who didst create us from the dust of the earth:
Grant that these ashes may be unto us a symbol of our mortality
and a sign of our penitence, that we may remember that it is by
thy grace alone that we receive the gift of eternal life in Jesus
Christ our Savior. **Amen.**

Then ashes are imposed with the following words

Remember, O man, that thou art dust, and to dust thou shalt
return.

PSALM 51

All kneel. Psalm 51:1-17 is sung or said.

- 1 Have mercy upon me, O God, after thy great goodness; *
according to the multitude of thy mercies do away
mine offenses.
- 2 Wash me thoroughly from my wickedness, *
and cleanse me from my sin.
- 3 For I acknowledge my faults, *
and my sin is ever before me.
- 4 Against thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight; *
that thou mightest be justified in thy saying,
and clear when thou shalt judge.
- 5 Behold, I was shapen in wickedness, *
and in sin hath my mother conceived me.
- 6 But lo, thou requirest truth in the inward parts, *
and shalt make me to understand wisdom secretly.
- 7 Thou shalt purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; *
thou shalt wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
- 8 Thou shalt make me hear of joy and gladness, *
that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.
- 9 Turn thy face from my sins, *
and put out all my misdeeds.
- 10 Make me a clean heart, O God, *
and renew a right spirit within me.
- 11 Cast me not away from thy presence, *
and take not thy holy Spirit from me.
- 12 O give me the comfort of thy help again, *
and stablish me with thy free Spirit.
- 13 Then shall I teach thy ways unto the wicked, *
and sinners shall be converted unto thee.

- 14 Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God,
thou that art the God of my health; *
and my tongue shall sing of thy righteousness.
- 15 Thou shalt open my lips, O Lord, *
and my mouth shall show thy praise.
- 16 For thou desirest no sacrifice, else would I give it thee; *
but thou delightest not in burnt-offerings.
- 17 The sacrifice of God is a troubled spirit: *
a broken and contrite heart, O God, shalt thou not despise.

CONFESSION AND LITANY OF PENITENCE

The Deacon or other person appointed says

Let us humbly confess our sins unto Almighty God.

Silence may follow. The Officiant and People together, all kneeling, pray

Most holy and merciful Father,
we confess unto thee, and to one another,
and to the whole communion of saints
in heaven and on earth,
that we have sinned, through our own fault
in thought, word, and deed;
by what we have done, and by what we have left undone.
We have not loved thee with our whole heart, and mind,
and strength.
We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.
nor have we forgiven others, as we have been forgiven.
We have failed to heed thy call to serve, as Christ served us,
and we have abandoned the mind of Christ.
We have grieved thy Holy Spirit.

Reader Lord, have mercy upon us:

People For we have sinned against thee.

The Reader alone continues, and the People respond

For all our unfaithfulness and disobedience;
for the pride, vanity, and hypocrisy of our lives;
Lord, have mercy upon us:

People **For we have sinned against thee.**

For our self-pity and impatience, and our envy of those
we think more fortunate than ourselves;
Lord, have mercy upon us:

People **For we have sinned against thee.**

For our unrighteous anger, bitterness, and resentment;
for all lies, gossip, and slander against our neighbors;
Lord, have mercy upon us:

People **For we have sinned against thee.**

For our sexual impurity, our exploitation of other people,
and our failure to give of ourselves in love;
Lord, have mercy upon us:

People **For we have sinned against thee.**

For our self-indulgent appetites and ways,
and our intemperate pursuit of worldly goods and comforts;
Lord, have mercy upon us:

People **For we have sinned against thee.**

For our dishonesty in daily life and work,
our ingratitude for thy gifts, and our failure to heed thy call.
Lord, have mercy upon us:

People **For we have sinned against thee.**

For our blindness to human need and suffering,
and our indifference to injustice and cruelty;
Lord, have mercy upon us:

People For we have sinned against thee.

For our wastefulness and misuse of thy creation,
and our lack of concern for those who come after us;
Lord, have mercy upon us:

People For we have sinned against thee.

For all false judgments, for prejudice and contempt of others,
and for all uncharitable thoughts toward our neighbors;
Lord, have mercy upon us:

People For we have sinned against thee.

For our negligence in prayer and worship;
for our presumption and abuse of thy means of grace;
Lord, have mercy upon us:

People For we have sinned against thee.

For seeking the praise of others rather than the approval of God;
Lord, have mercy upon us:

People For we have sinned against thee.

For our failure to commend the faith that is in us;
Lord, have mercy upon us:

People For we have sinned against thee.

All then pray

Be favorable, O Lord, be favorable to thy people, who turn to thee in weeping, fasting, and praying. For thou art a merciful God, full of compassion, longsuffering, and of great pity. Thou sparest when we deserve punishment, and in thy wrath thinkest upon mercy. Spare thy people, good Lord, spare them, and let not thine heritage be brought to confusion. Hear us, O Lord, for thy mercy is great, and after the multitude of thy mercies look upon us; through the merits and mediation of thy blessed Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE ABSOLUTION

The Bishop, if present, or the Priest, alone stands and says

Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, desireth not the death of sinners, but that they may turn from their wickedness and live. He hath empowered and commanded his ministers to pronounce to his people, being penitent, the absolution and remission of their sins. He pardoneth and absolveth all who truly repent and unfeignedly believe his holy Gospel. Wherefore we beseech him to grant us true repentance and his Holy Spirit, that our present deeds may please him, the rest of our lives may be pure and holy, and that at the last we may come unto his eternal joy; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Or the following

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, who of his great mercy hath promised forgiveness of sins to all those who with hearty repentance and true faith turn unto him, have mercy upon you, pardon and deliver you from all your sins, confirm and strengthen you in all goodness, and bring you to everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

THE COMFORTABLE WORDS

The Officiant may then say one or more of the following sentences, first saying

Hear the Word of God to all who truly turn to him.

Come unto me, all ye that travail and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you. MATTHEW 11:28

God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, to the end that all that believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. JOHN 3:16^T

This is a true saying, and worthy of all men to be received, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

I TIMOTHY 1:15

If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the perfect offering for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world.

I JOHN 2:1-2^T

THE PEACE

Officiant The Peace of the Lord be always with you.
People **And with thy spirit.**

When there is Communion, the liturgy continues with the Offertory. The Proper Preface of Lent is used. The prayer below may be said by the Celebrant before the final blessing.

If there is no Communion, the Lord's Prayer is then said. The following prayer may be used to conclude the liturgy.

Officiant Let us pray.

**O Lord our God, grant us grace to desire thee with our whole heart:
that desiring thee, we may seek thee;
and that seeking thee, we may find thee;
and that finding thee, we may love thee;
and that loving thee, we may hate those sins from which thou
hast delivered us;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

ADDITIONAL DIRECTIONS

The silence after the Invitation to a Holy Lent is an integral part of the rite, and should not be omitted or reduced to a mere pause. Other periods of silence may be observed to allow for meditation, self-examination, and prayer.

The ashes are traditionally made from the palms of the previous Palm Sunday.

In the absence of a Priest, and with the authorization of the Bishop, a Deacon or lay person may lead the liturgy, except that instead of the absolution, the following words are used:

Grant, we beseech thee, merciful Lord, to thy faithful people pardon and peace, that we may be cleansed from all our sins, and serve thee with a quiet mind; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**