



Ash Wednesday at Home

17th February 2021

Background

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of our journey through Lent, a time to put aside some of the pleasures and distractions of everyday life in order to deepen our friendship with and trust for God.

The Ash Wednesday service is designed to help us to come to God in the understanding that we will one day give him an account of how we have lived our lives. We take an opportunity to look at our lives, our hearts and let God see us too, in the faith that he loves us and is working out his grace in us. In the words of Jesus from the gospel reading where he teaches on prayer:

"Find a quiet, secluded place so you won't be tempted to role-play before God. Just be there as simply and honestly as you can manage. The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense his grace."

What you'll need

- Some time.
- Pieces of paper and a pen or pencil
- A metal pan or roasting tin
- Some matches or a lighter
- A small dish/saucer of oil (olive oil is best)
- Optional: marshmallows and the means to toast them!

Preparation

Find a quiet place and time in your day, either on your own or with others in your household.

Try to change gear into a more reflective place – perhaps ask, what are you grateful for today? What sadness, disappointment or anxiety do you bring with you.

Now read the service below – if you're reading it with others, the words in **bold** are meant to be read together.

Introduction

Brothers and sisters in Christ, since early days Christians have observed with great devotion the time of our Lord's passion and resurrection and prepared for this by a season of penitence and fasting.

By carefully keeping these days, Christians take to heart the call to repentance and the assurance of forgiveness proclaimed in the gospel, and so grow in faith and in devotion to our Lord.

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 self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God's holy word.

All Holy God,
holy and strong,
holy and immortal,
have mercy upon us.

The Collect

Let us pray for grace to keep Lent faithfully.

Silence is kept.

Holy God,
our lives are laid open before you:
rescue us from the chaos of sin
and through the death of your Son
bring us healing and make us whole

in Jesus Christ our Lord. *A// Amen.*

Reading

Jesus' words to his followers remind us not to be overly *religious* when we do good things for others, like giving away money, when we pray or fast (giving something up for Lent). Jesus teaches that these practices all have value, but that we shouldn't aim to impress anyone with them, rather we do them in the sight of God who is loving and gracious to us. Like a father.

Matthew 6:1-21 (The Message)

The World Is Not a Stage

6 "Be especially careful when you are trying to be good so that you don't make a performance out of it. It might be good theatre, but the God who made you won't be applauding.

2-4 "When you do something for someone else, don't call attention to yourself. You've seen them in action, I'm sure—'playactors' I call them—treating prayer meeting and street corner alike as a stage, acting compassionate as long as someone is watching, playing to the crowds. They get applause, true, but that's all they get. When you help someone out, don't think about how it looks. Just do it—quietly and unobtrusively. That is the way your God, who conceived you in love, working behind the scenes, helps you out.

Pray with Simplicity

5 "And when you come before God, don't turn that into a theatrical production either. All these people making a regular show out of their prayers, hoping for fifteen minutes of fame! Do you think God sits in a box seat?

6 "Here's what I want you to do: Find a quiet, secluded place so you won't be tempted to role-play before God. Just be there as simply and honestly as you can manage. The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense his grace.

7-13 "The world is full of so-called prayer warriors who are prayer-ignorant. They're full of formulas and programs and advice, peddling techniques for getting what you want from God. Don't fall for that nonsense. This is your Father you are dealing with, and he knows better than you what you need. With a God like this loving you, you can pray very simply. Like this:

Our Father in heaven,
Reveal who you are.
Set the world right;
Do what's best—
 as above, so below.
Keep us alive with three square meals.
Keep us forgiven with you and forgiving others.
Keep us safe from ourselves and the Devil.
You're in charge!
You can do anything you want!
You're ablaze in beauty!
 Yes. Yes. Yes.

14-15 "In prayer there is a connection between what God does and what you do. You can't get forgiveness from God, for instance, without also forgiving others. If you refuse to do your part, you cut yourself off from God's part.

16-18 "When you practice some appetite-denying discipline to better concentrate on God, don't make a production out of it. It might turn you into a small-time celebrity but it won't make you a saint. If you 'go into training' inwardly, act normal outwardly. Shampoo and comb your hair, brush your teeth, wash your face. God doesn't require attention-getting devices. He won't overlook what you are doing; he'll reward you well.

A Life of God-Worship

19-21 "Don't hoard treasure down here where it gets eaten by moths and corroded by rust or—worse!—stolen by burglars. Stockpile treasure in heaven, where it's safe from moth and rust and burglars. It's obvious, isn't it? The place where your treasure is, is the place you will most want to be, and end up being.

Reflect

How might you enter into God's grace this Lent?
What practices might help you to draw nearer to God?

Self-examination and Confession

Invite the Holy Spirit to search your heart and bring to mind anything that is not right.

Write some of these things on pieces of paper, fold them in half and leave them in the metal pan or tin. Leave them there in the sight of God, keep some silence and then pray the prayer below.

Silence is kept.

**All We have not loved you with our whole heart.
We have not loved our neighbours as ourselves.
In your mercy
forgive what we have been,
help us to amend what we are,
and direct what we shall be;
that we may do justly,
love mercy,
and walk humbly with you, our God.
Amen.**

Now set fire to these pieces of paper (safely!), as a sign that Jesus has taken our sins on him – they died with him as he died on the cross so that we can be free from them.



Wait a moment for the ashes to cool and mash them up with a teaspoon.

We will use these ashes in the next section as a sign of our *mortality*: a reminder that each of us will die one day and leave this life behind; before being welcomed into the everlasting life that Jesus welcomes us into if we put our trust in him.

The Imposition of Ashes

Dear friends in Christ,
I invite you to receive these ashes
as a sign of the spirit of penitence¹
with which we shall keep this season
of Lent.

God our Father,
you create us from the dust of the
earth:
grant that these ashes may be for us
a sign of our penitence
and a symbol of our mortality;
for it is by your grace alone
that we receive eternal life
in Jesus Christ our Saviour.
All Amen.



Now take your thumb and dip it into the oil before picking up some of the ashes with your oily thumb. Spread the ashes on your (or someone else's) forehead, saying these words:

*"Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.
Turn away from sin and be faithful to Christ."*

¹ Penitence means being sorry for what we've done wrong, but also a determination to change - to live our lives differently

Toasting Marshmallows

You may like to take some time out to toast marshmallows (as long as you haven't already given them up for Lent).

Reflect:

Describe the marshmallow before and after toasting. What has changed? Which looks better?



The fire has burned the outside of the marshmallow but the inside is now softer and sweeter than it was before.

Consider how God works through the “refining fires” of hardship in our lives (lockdown, loss, pain and change) to soften our hearts.

Pray these words from Psalm 139:

*Investigate my life, O God,
find out everything about me;
Cross-examine and test me,
get a clear picture of what I'm about;
See for yourself whether I've done anything wrong—
then guide me on the road to eternal life.*

Final Blessing

May Christ give you grace to grow in holiness,
to deny yourselves, take up your cross, and follow him;
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among you and remain with you always.
All **Amen.**

The Dismissal

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
All **In the name of Christ. Amen.**