

ASH WEDNESDAY PRAYER SERVICE

Virtue Link: Faith, Hope, Love, Justice, Temperance, Fortitude
Catholic Character Themes: Community, Compassion, Discipleship, Reverence, Solidarity,
Stewardship

Introduction

The Hebrew People of the Old Testament understood that human life was short, and that all people 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 that we 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 peace and in joy with God and with 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 sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist. The small sacrifices we make during Lent make room in our hearts to welcome the risen Jesus at Easter.

OPENING SONG:

Please join in our opening song: (Sugg: *Hosea*, *Glory & Praise*)

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:

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

God our Father, 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 hearts, when we greet your risen Son at Easter. We ask you this through Christ our Lord. 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.

REFLECTION: Lent: A Season of Grace

TCosentino, RCCDSB

Baptism: Gift of Abundant Life

As Christians, we worship a God who constantly invites our “yes” to the gift of abundant life. Baptism introduces us to this gift by joining us to Christ in his death and rising. This foretaste of the resurrection leaves us hungering for life in all its fullness. The gift of the Spirit, poured into our hearts at Baptism and sealed at Confirmation, guides us in our journey to fullness of life through the Church’s sacraments and holy seasons.

Lengthening Days That Point to Easter

With the lengthening of winter’s days we find ourselves contemplating the journey through Lent to Easter. The growing hours of daylight remind us of the resurrection’s light, tasted at Baptism and in further sacramental encounters with our crucified and risen Lord.

Time for a Change of Heart

Lent gives us time to consider our response to the Gospel’s call to love of God and neighbour: the *New Law* of Christ, written on our hearts by the Spirit at Baptism. Our Lenten prayer is thus one of *repentance* for sin, which fails to meet the demands of charity. It asks for a *change of heart*, that God might restore in us the heart of Christ, bestowed at Baptism.

Hidden With Christ in God

Lent is a season of grace that invites us to *fast* from what distracts us from charity, and to recognize that only God can fulfill our deepest longings. Lent invites us to engage in *almsgiving* and *works of mercy* towards our suffering and needy brothers and sisters. Lent reminds us that our truest self lies hidden with Christ in God, and that in Christ, we are one body.

A Time for Renewing our Trust

The resurrection experience of Jesus tells us that in him, we can trust that the Father will raise us up in the power of the Spirit from the small deaths we so often seem to undergo during Lent, so that we might joyfully celebrate the fullness of life that is our inheritance through Baptism, at Easter.

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. We pray to the Lord.

All: Renew our Hearts, O Lord.

2. Let us pray for our bishop, 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 in the abiding presence of the crucified and risen Christ. 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 as a people your fullness of life.

As we prepare to 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.

Amen.

Let us go in the peace of Christ.

ALL: Thanks be to God.

CLOSING SONG: (Sugg: *Come and Journey* CBW III No. 476)