

# ASH WEDNESDAY

**A shared service to welcome the season of Lent**

From the dust of the earth God made humanity. The Christian Church takes up today the symbolism of dust - the raw material for Creation, and the destination of all that lives. In this element the wonder and the agony of human life lies still: here is utter dissolution, and here is a potentiality which demands the hand of God. Here is our destiny, compounded of fear and hope.

*We stand to recite together these words of the Book of Wisdom:*

**Lord, you are merciful to all,  
and hate nothing that you have created.  
You overlook our sins, to bring us to repentance;  
You are the Lord, our God.**

*The Celebrant reads the Prayer for Ash Wednesday*

Lord our God,  
you formed us from the clay of the earth  
and breathed into us the spirit of life,  
but we turned from your face and sinned.

In this time of repentance  
we call out for your mercy.  
Bring us back to you  
and to the life your Son won for us  
by his death on the Cross:  
for he lives and reigns for ever and ever.  
**Amen.**

*After this we sit to hear the Word of God.*

**A Reading from the Book of Deuteronomy**  
*30:15-20)*

*(Dt*

Moses said to the people: "Look, today I am offering you life and prosperity, death and disaster. If you obey the commandments of the Lord, your God, and follow his

ways, if you keep his commandments, his laws, and his customs, you will live and grow numerous, and the Lord, your God will bless you in the land which you are about to enter and make your own. But if your heart turns away, if you refuse to listen, if you let yourself be drawn into worshipping other gods and serving them, I tell you today, you will most certainly perish; you will not live for long in the country which you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. Today I call heaven and earth to witness against you: I am offering you life or death, blessing or curse. Choose life, then, so that you and your descendants may live, in the love of the Lord, your God, obeying his voice, holding fast to him; for in this your life consists, and on this depends the length of time that you stay in the country which the Lord swore to your ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that he would give them.

V. This is the Word of the Lord. R. **Thanks be to God.**

**Responsorial Psalm**  
***Miserere***

**Psalm 50**

Response: **Have mer-cy on me, Lord, Have mer - cy.**

Have mercy on me, God, in your kindness,  
In your compassion blot out my offence;  
O wash me more and more from my guilt,  
And cleanse me from my sin.

My offences, truly I know them,  
My sin is always before me;  
Against you, you alone, have I sinned,  
What is evil in your sight I have done.

That you may be justified when you give sentence,  
And be without reproach when you judge:  
O see, in guilt I was born,  
A sinner was I conceived.

Indeed you love truth in the heart,  
then in the secret of my heart teach me wisdom;  
O purify me, then I shall be clean,  
O wash me, I shall be whiter than snow.

Make me hear rejoicing and gladness,  
That the bones you have crushed may revive;  
From my sins turn away your face,  
And blot out all my guilt.

A pure heart create for me, my God,  
put a steadfast spirit within me;  
Do not cast me away from your presence,  
nor deprive me of your holy spirit.

Give me again the joy of your help,  
with a spirit of fervour sustain me;  
that I may teach transgressors your ways,  
and sinners may return to you.

O rescue me, God, my helper,  
and my tongue shall ring out your goodness.  
O Lord, open my lips,  
and my mouth shall declare your praise.

For in sacrifice you take no delight,  
burnt-offering from me you would refuse;  
My sacrifice, a contrite spirit,  
A humbled, contrite heart you will not spurn.

In your goodness, show favour to Zion,  
rebuild the walls of Jerusalem;  
then you will be pleased with lawful sacrifice,  
burnt-offerings wholly consumed.

*Stand for the Gospel* (Mt 6:1-6, 16-18).

V. The Lord be with you. R. **And also with you.**

V. A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.

R. **Glory to you, Lord.**

Jesus said to his disciples: "Be careful not to parade your good deeds in front of people to attract their notice; by doing this you will lose all reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give alms, do not have it trumpeted before you; this is what the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets to win people's admiration. I tell you solemnly, they have had their reward. But when you give alms, your left hand must not know what your right is doing; your almsgiving must be secret, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you.

And when you pray, do not imitate the hypocrites: they love to say their prayers standing up in the synagogues and at the street-corners for people to see them. I tell you solemnly, they have had their reward. But when you pray, go to your private room and, when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in that secret place, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you.

When you fast, do not pull long faces as the hypocrites do, to let people know they are fasting. I tell you solemnly, they have had their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that no-one will know you are fasting except your Father, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you.

V. This is the Gospel of the Lord. R. **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

*There follows a short response to the Word of God.*

*The celebrant prays over the ashes:*

Lord, bless the sinner who asks for your forgiveness,  
and bless all who receive these ashes.  
May they keep this Lenten season  
in preparation for the joy of Easter.

*Then the ashes are imposed on the foreheads of those who come forward. During the distribution we sing the following song:*

Response: **Remember, remember your mercy, Lord.  
Remember, remember your mercy, Lord.  
Hear your people's prayer as they call to you:  
Remember, remember your mercy, Lord.**

(First time through, cantor sings response and congregation repeat)

1. Lord, make me know your ways.  
Lord, teach me your paths.  
Make me walk in your truth and teach me:  
for you are God my saviour. (Response)
2. Remember your mercy, Lord, and the love you have shown from of old.  
Do not remember the sins of my youth.  
In your love remember me, in your love remember me  
because of your goodness, O Lord. (Response)
3. The Lord is good and upright.

He shows the path to all who stray,  
he guides the humble in the right path;  
he teaches his way to the poor. (*Response*)

*At the end of the distribution of ashes this responsory is recited:*

- V. Direct our hearts to better things, O Lord,  
heal our sin and ignorance.  
Lord, do not face us suddenly with death,  
but give us days for repentance.
- R. **Turn to us with mercy, Lord, for we have sinned against you.**
- V. Help us, God our Saviour; rescue us for the honour of your name.
- R. **Turn to us with mercy, Lord, for we have sinned against you.**

*Several intentions for prayer will now be offered, each followed by a few moments of silence, closed by the response:*

- V. Your love, O Lord, is eternal. R. **Discard not the work of your hands.**

*Then the Celebrant introduces the Lord's prayer:*

- V. Let us pray together in the words our Saviour gave us.

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread,  
and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against  
us;  
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.**

*The Celebrant reads the Prayer over the People:*

Lord,  
grant that your faithful people  
may continually desire to relive the mystery of the Cross,  
and so be reborn to live a new life  
through Christ our Lord.  
**Amen.**

**The Blessing of Aaron**

V. May the Lord bless you and keep you. R. **Amen.**

V. May his face shine on you and be gracious to you. R. **Amen.**

V. May he look upon you with kindness, and give you his peace. R. **Amen.**

V. May the blessing of almighty God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, come down on you and remain with you always. R. **Amen.**

*The service ends with this hymn:*

Be still, my soul, the Lord is on your side;  
Bear patiently the Cross of grief and pain;  
Leave to your God to order and provide;  
In every change, he faithful will remain.

Be still, my soul, your best, your heavenly friend  
Through thorny ways leads to a joyful end.

Be still, my soul, your God will undertake  
To guide the future, as he has the past.  
Your hope, your confidence let nothing shake,  
All now mysterious shall be clear at last.

Be still, my soul, the tempests still obey  
His voice, who ruled them once on Galilee.

Be still, my soul, the hour is hastening on  
When we shall be forever with the Lord:  
When disappointment, grief and fear are gone,  
Sorrow forgotten, love's pure joy restored.

Be still, my soul: when change and tears are past,  
All safe and blessed we shall meet at last.