

Ash Wednesday Prayer Service



Opening Hymn

Hosea

John Michael Talbot

Come back to me with all your heart
Don't let fear keep us apart
Trees do bend though straight and tall
So must we to others' call

Long have I waited for
Your coming home to me
And living deeply our new lives

The wilderness will lead you
To the place where I will speak
Integrity and justice
With tenderness
You shall know.

Long have I waited for
Your coming home to me
And living deeply our new lives

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Introduction

On Ash Wednesday, we begin again our Lenten journey of renewal and conversion. On this day our foreheads are marked with ashes in the sign of the Cross with the words: 'Dust you are and into dust you shall return'

We pray that Lent 2021 will be a journey of renewal for us personally, for our families, for the community, and for the world. Pope Francis, reflecting on the ashes traditionally imposed on our foreheads at the start of Lent, said: "We are dust in the universe. Yet we are dust loved by God." The Holy Father added that we are precious dust that is destined for eternal life. He described Lent as a time of grace during which we can change our lives by letting God gaze upon us with love.

This Ash Wednesday, as we begin our walk with Jesus to the cross and resurrection, we unite our mortality and limits to Christ's own suffering and passion in order that we might share his divine life. We know that Easter will come and that Christ will rise. We pray for God's grace this Lent to respond to his loving invitation, the call to repent. In returning to the Father, we experience the deep compassion of God that compels us too, to be compassionate to others.

Opening Prayer

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.
By your grace,
may our lives become more deeply rooted in prayer,
self-sacrifice and a willingness to share.
Let us walk with you this Lent as we face our own limitations
and seek to be your presence in the world.
Create in us clean hearts
that we might know, love, and serve you better through our service of others.
We ask this through Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**

Scripture

A reading from the prophet Joel. (Joel 2:12.16)
Now, now – it is the Lord who speaks –
come back to me with all your heart,
turn to the Lord your God again,
for he is all tenderness and compassion,
slow to anger, rich in graciousness, and ready to relent.
The word of the Lord.

Or

A reading from the prophet Ezekiel (Ezekiel 36: 26-27)
And the Lord said: I will give you a new heart, and place a new spirit within you,
taking from your bodies your stony hearts, and giving you hearts of love. I will
put my spirit within you, and make you live by my ways, careful to observe my
decrees.
The word of the Lord.

Reflection

Pope Francis reminds us if we allow ourselves to be shaped by the hands of God,
we become - “something wonderful, since we are the dust of the earth, upon
which God has poured out his heaven, the dust that contains his dreams. We are
God's hope, his treasure and his glory.” Sin wounds us, our relationship with
each other and ultimately with God. Sin leads us into darkness, sorrow,
desolation and isolation from those whom we love most. It is in this darkness
and isolation that God reaches out to us from the abundance of his love. Lent is

a period to return home to the Father and live deeply a new life of love and oneness with God.

**'Lord, I will turn my face towards you.
I will lay before you the desert areas I hide
And turn to soak in
your refreshing words of life
I will cast aside the
barren, selfish pursuits
And turn to rest in
the tranquil warmth of your love.
I will draw back from
the harsh pull of media
And turn to bathe in the gentle power of your Spirit.
Lord, today I turn my face towards you.'**

(abridged Lenten prayer)

Lenten Litany (adapted)

Heavenly Father, this Lent we ask your grace	Lord, help us.
To fast from judging others and feast on what makes them special,	Lord, help us.
To fast from unkind words and feast on kindness,	Lord, help us.
To fast from jealousy and feast on offering compliments,	Lord, help us.
To fast from getting angry and feast on being patient,	Lord, help us.
To fast from worry and feast on trusting God,	Lord, help us.
To fast from complaining and feast on gratitude,	Lord, help us.
To fast from negative thoughts and feast on positive ones,	Lord, help us.
To fast from nastiness and feast on friendliness,	Lord, help us.
To fast from greed and feast on giving,	Lord, help us.
To fast from envy and feast on congratulating,	Lord, help us.
To fast from conflict and feast on understanding,	Lord, help us.
To fast from selfishness and feast on helping others,	Lord, help us.
To fast from doubt and feast on faith,	Lord, help us.
To fast from holding grudges and feast on forgiveness,	Lord, help us.
To fast from gloominess and feast on happiness,	Lord, help us.
To fast from discouragement and feast on hope,	Lord, help us.

Distribution of Ashes

O God, who desire not the death of sinners, but their conversion,
mercifully hear our prayers
and, in your kindness, be pleased to bless ✠ these ashes,
that we, who acknowledge we are but ashes and shall return to dust,
may, through a steadfast observance of Lent,
gain pardon for sins and newness of life
after the likeness of your Risen Son.
Who lives and reigns for ever and ever. **Amen.**

The priest sprinkles the ashes with holy water, without saying anything. Then the priest places ashes on the head of all those present who come to him and says to each one:

Repent and believe in the gospel.

or

Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return.

Prayers of the Faithful

Celebrant:

With confidence in our heavenly Father, we make our prayers known to him today:

1. That the Church and her shepherds will be a rich source of mercy and kindness for those burdened with the weight of sin and regret. **Lord, hear us.**
2. During this Lenten season, help us cultivate the will to change our lives, and the lives of others, by our charity, good example, and prayer. **Lord, hear us.**
3. For the determination to persevere in our Lenten commitment of prayer, fasting and almsgiving. May we experience a fresh outpouring of God's steadfast spirit within us. **Lord, hear us.**
4. This Lent, give us the grace to venture deeper into our own hearts. Give us greater insight into the demands of the Gospel, that we may be stronger ministers of your love and compassion. **Lord, hear us.**

5. For the poor and suffering in our world. May they find help, hope and comfort in the good works and sharing of God's people this Lent. **Lord, hear us.**
6. For all who are estranged from one another; harden not their hearts and may they seek your grace to be reconciled with those whom they struggle to accept. **Lord, hear us.**
7. For all who are sick or suffering in any way, that they may know the presence and comfort of the Lord. **Lord, hear us.**
8. For the dead. In the Lord's mercy may they experience 'the favourable time, the day of salvation'. **Lord, hear us.**

Celebrant:

As we begin the Lenten season, we turn to you in repentance and embrace your holiness with all our heart. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Together we say the prayer which Jesus taught us.

Our Father...

Closing Prayer

God our Father,
You formed us from the dust of the earth
And brought us to new life in Christ
Through the waters of Baptism. We ask you to change our hearts
As we journey through these forty days of Lent.
Help us to see Jesus in everyone we meet,
And to serve him in all persons,
Especially the poor, the sick and the lonely.
By your grace, may our prayers and sacrifices this Lent
Help us grow closer to each another and to you,
As one family in Jesus.
We make this prayer to you in His name.
Amen.