



Ash Wednesday
February 17, 2021

Introduction and instruction

Ash Wednesday invites us into almsgiving, prayer and fasting, the three traditional Lenten practices that can draw us into a deeper relationship with the Lord. It remains a very popular day of devotion among Catholics, with well-attended celebrations in our parishes and schools.

We do not want to let the COVID-19 pandemic get in the way of this important day. The official liturgy of the Church allows for the distribution of ashes to take place outside of mass. Each parish will celebrate the blessing of the ashes on Ash Wednesday. Then, if a household or school would like to celebrate this ritual, they may obtain a small sample of the blessed ashes, and may use this ritual pamphlet to distribute the ashes locally.

Normally the actual distribution of ashes is limited to Ash Wednesday itself, but it is possible that local situations make this difficult. Households or schools are therefore welcome to do the ceremony any time in the month of February following Ash Wednesday, as close as possible to the actual day so as to preserve its meaning. The leader may be any Catholic adult. For households and schools with non-Catholics present, they are welcome to also receive the ashes if they ask for it voluntarily or (for children) their parents or guardians allow for it.

Once the ritual is completed, the remaining ashes should not be thrown out. After all, they have been blessed by God. They may be returned to the local parish, or buried in the ground in a respectful manner.

May all our homes and schools be blessed!

The prayer opens with the sign of the cross (you can light a candle)

Leader: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

Together all say the entrance antiphon

All: You are merciful to all, O Lord, and despise nothing that you have made. You overtook people's sins, to bring them to repentance, and you spare them, for you are the Lord our God.

The leader then reads the collect

Leader: Grant, O Lord, that we may begin with holy fasting this campaign of Christian service, so that, as we take up battle against spiritual evils, we may be armed with weapons of self-restraint. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.

All: Amen.

The first reading is read by a member of the household

A reading from the prophet Joel

Even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; rend your hearts and not your clothing.

Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing.

Who knows whether the Lord will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him: a grain offering and a drink offering to be presented to the Lord, your God?

Blow the trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly; gather the people. Sanctify the congregation; assemble the aged; gather the children, even infants at the breast. Let the bridegroom leave his room, and the bride her canopy.

Between the vestibule and the altar, let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep. Let them say, "Spare your people, O Lord, and do not make your heritage a mockery, a byword among the nations. Why should it be said among the peoples, "Where is their God?"

Then the Lord became jealous for his land, and had pity on his people.
The word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

The psalm is led by a member of the household

Reader: Have mercy, O Lord, for we have sinned.

All: Have mercy, O Lord, for we have sinned.

Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.

All: Have mercy, O Lord, for we have sinned.

For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.
Against you, you alone, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight.

All: Have mercy, 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 from your presence
and do not take your holy Spirit from me.

All: Have mercy, O Lord, for we have sinned.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and sustain me in a willing spirit.
O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.

All: Have mercy, O Lord, for we have sinned.

The gospel is read by a member of the household

Reader: A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.

All: Glory to you, O Lord.

Jesus said to the disciples: “Beware of practicing your piety before people in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

“So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

“And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

“And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Blessing and Distribution of Ashes

Leader: Let us humbly ask God our Father, that he be pleased to bless us with the abundance of his grace through these ashes, which we will put on our heads in penitence.

All pause for a moment of silence. Then the leader continues:

Leader: O God, who are moved by acts of humility and respond with forgiveness to works of penance, lend your merciful ear to our prayers and in your kindness pour out the grace of your blessing on your servants who are marked with these ashes, that, as they follow the Lenten observances, they may be worthy to come with minds made pure to celebrate the Paschal Mystery of your Son. Through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

The faithful come forward to receive ashes. The leader sprinkles a small amount on their head, saying for each:

Leader: Repent, and believe in the Gospel.

After all the ashes are distributed, we have the prayers of the faithful, which are read by a member of the household.

Reader: The response is: "Lord, hear our prayer."

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

Reader: For the members of our community: may we all recognize in the celebration of the ashes a call to renew our relationship with Christ Jesus. Lord, we pray to you.

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

Reader: For people affected by the pandemic: may they find in this Lenten season an unsuspected strength and courage that will help them cope with the difficulties of life. Lord, we pray to you.

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

Reader: For bishops, priests, deacons and committed lay people: may this time of grace and renewal inspire them to find new ways of exercising their ministry and evangelizing with renewed zeal. Lord, we pray to you.

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

Reader: For the sick and suffering people of our community: may the season of Lent be an opportunity for them to grow closer to the One who lives close to us, brings us consolation, heals us and fills us with his life. Lord, we pray to you.

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

Other prayers can be added according to the needs of the household or school.

The leader then says the prayer over the people with the conclusion

Leader: Pour out a spirit of compunction, O God, on those who bow before your majesty, and by your mercy may they merit the rewards you promise to those who do penance. Through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

Leader: Let us bless the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

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NOTA BENE: To dispose of the Ashes, either bring them back to your Church or bury them in the ground. They should not be thrown in the garbage or flushed down the sink or the toilet.

Evaluation form*

1. How was your experience of this celebration?
2. What did you like the most?
3. What would need to be improved?
4. Would you be ready to relive a similar experience?
5. Other comments, suggestions

* Please complete this evaluation form and send it to j.vezina@ssmd.ca or by facsimile to 705-674-9889 **by March 12, 2021.**