

# HOME WORSHIP FOR ASH WEDNESDAY

## What is Ash Wednesday?

Ash Wednesday begins the season of Lent, the 40 days (excluding Sundays) that lead up to Easter. This first day of Lent and the following liturgical season are marked with a sombreness as Christians reflect on their mortality, their sinfulness, and the dying of self that comes with new life in Christ. While there is no mention of Ash Wednesday in the Bible, the Old Testament records acts of repentance or mourning accompanied by symbolic ash and sackcloth. Recall stories of David, Esther, Job, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Daniel.

## Why do we put ashes on our foreheads?



Ashes are a biblical reminder of our mortality: “You are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:19). The spreading of ashes on foreheads is a visible reminder of this. The ashes also represent sorrow and repentance for sin.

Ash Wednesday reminds us that two things are involved in genuine repentance: the dying of the old self and the coming to life of the new. The way to Easter is the way of the cross. “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?” (Romans 6:3). New life with Christ involves a daily surrendering of the old life. Ash Wednesday, the first step of this Lenten journey, invites us to acknowledge our mortality and our sinfulness by the imposition of ashes.

## Preparing ...

### Ashes

- If you still have your palms from last year’s Palm Sunday, burn them.
- You may also mix the ashes with **a little bit of olive oil**.
- **DO NOT MIX ASHES WITH WATER**: this makes a caustic form of lye.

### No Ashes? No problem.

- Write a particular sin or hurtful or unjust characteristic on a small piece of paper.
- They may then be burned instead of the palm branches for the ashes.
- At a minimum, you may simply use olive oil to trace a cross on your forehead.

## The Liturgy

- Have someone read the rubrics *red letters* or read them in solitude.
- If you are praying in solitude, pray and read the entire liturgy.
- If you are praying with family or friends in your household bubble divide up the readings and prayers so that everyone has a role. All say the words in **bold print**.
- There are four parts to this at-home liturgy: **Gather, Word, Respond, Send**.

# GATHER

## Call to Worship (based on Joel 2:12-13)

“Even now,” declares the LORD, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.

Rend your hearts, and not your garments.”

Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and filled with compassion and love.

## Opening Prayer

Almighty God: you love all your children, and do not want to see them punished for their sins.

Help us to face up to ourselves,

admit we are in the wrong,

and raise our eyes with confidence to your mercy;

in Jesus Christ, the Lord.

**Amen.**

# WORD

## *We ask God for illumination*

**Holy God, our lives are laid open before you:  
as we hear your word 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. Amen.**

**Old Testament Reading:** Joel 2.1-2, 12–17

**Gospel Reading:** Matthew 6.1–6, 16–21

*We keep Holy silence to reflect on the Word*



# RESPOND

## *We are invited to observe a Lenten Discipline*

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ: the early Christians observed with great devotion the days of our Lord’s passion and resurrection, and it became the custom of the Church that before the Easter celebration there should be a forty-day season of spiritual preparation.

During this season converts to the faith were prepared for Holy Baptism.

It was also a time when persons who had committed serious sins and had separated themselves from the community of faith were reconciled by penitence and forgiveness and restored to participation in the life of the Church. In this way the whole congregation was reminded of the mercy and forgiveness proclaimed in the gospel of Jesus Christ and the need we all have to renew our faith.

We invite you, therefore, in the name of the Church, to observe a holy Lent: by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God's Holy Word.

To make a right beginning of repentance, and as a mark of our mortal nature, let us now kneel or bow before our Creator and Redeemer as we are able.

*A brief silence is kept as we kneel or bow.*

## Prayer of Confession

"Come now, let us reason together," says the Lord. "Though your sins be as scarlet I shall make them white as snow." (Isaiah 1:18)

**Gracious God,  
our sins are too heavy to carry,  
too real to hide, and too deep to undo.  
Forgive what our lips tremble to name,  
what our hearts can no longer bear,  
and what has become for us a consuming fire of judgment.  
Set us free from a past we cannot change;  
open us to a future in which we can be changed;  
and grant us grace to grow in your likeness and image;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**



*Father, I have sinned against  
God and against you*

## We give thanks over the ashes

Almighty God, you have created us out of the dust of the earth.  
Grant that these ashes may be to us a sign of our mortality and penitence,  
so that we may remember that only by your gracious gift  
are we given everlasting life;  
through Jesus Christ our saviour.

**Amen.**

## We impose the Ash

*Dip a thumb in the ashes and make a cross on the forehead of each person. As they make the sign of the cross, they say:*

Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.  
Turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel

*When all have received the ashes, the following prayer is said.*

Let us pray.

**May the almighty and merciful God,  
who desires not the death of a sinner  
but that we turn from wickedness and live,  
accept our repentance,  
forgive our sins,  
and restore us by the Holy Spirit to newness of life.  
Amen.**



*Turn away from sin  
and be faithful to  
the Gospel*

## SEND

As our Saviour commanded and taught us, so we pray.

**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.  
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory,  
for ever and ever.  
Amen.**



### Closing Prayer

Gracious God, you created us out of the dust of the earth  
and breathed into us the breath of life.  
By your hand we live and to your hands we return when all our days are done.  
Grant that the awareness of our mortality may lead us not to fear, but to faith.  
In our weakness teach us to look to you for strength,  
in our failures to turn to you and find forgiveness,  
and in our dying to await the gift of everlasting life;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

### A Prayer of Blessing

**Accomplish in us, O God, the work of your salvation,  
That we may show forth your glory in the world.  
By the cross and passion of our Saviour,  
bring us with all your saints to the joy of Christ's resurrection.  
Amen.**

