

ASH

Wednesday

RETURN
TO THE
LORD
YOUR
GOD

ASH WEDNESDAY

On Ash Wednesday we begin our forty-day journey toward Easter with a day of fasting and repentance. While we journey through Lent to return to God, we have already been reconciled to God through Christ. We humbly pray for God to make our hearts clean while we rejoice that "now is the day of salvation." Returning to our baptismal call, we more intentionally bear the fruits of mercy and justice in the world.

PRELUDE

HYMN: "Savior, When in Dust to You" (verses 1 & 2)

Savior, when in dust to you
low we bow in homage due;
when, repentant, to the skies
scarce we lift our weeping eyes;
oh, by all your pains and woe
suffered once for us below,
bending from your throne on high,
hear our penitential cry!

By your helpless infant years,
by your life of want and tears,
by your days of deep distress
in the savage wilderness,
by the dread, mysterious hour
of the insulting tempter's pow'r,
turn, oh, turn a fav'ring eye;
hear our penitential cry!

OPENING PRAYER

P/ Loving Lord of life; as we journey through this holy season of Lent, give us grace and strength to make the changes that are needed in our lives, and in so doing, may we be open to your leading. Keep us mindful that you are with us in every moment, offering us the strength and creativity to choose what is right. Amen.

WELCOME

P/ Welcome to a season of self-examination. This is a time to ponder the depth of God's love and lengths to which some have gone to bring awareness of that transforming love into the world. It is also a time to ponder what God wills for us and the world; which the Bible names as justice and Jesus called "life abundant." Finally, it is a time to ponder what God's love and God's will for us call us to do. How are we to live? How are we to treat the earth, ourselves, and our neighbors? Let us open ourselves to God's presence, knowing that God is here and everywhere, and that God speaks to us on our inmost being. Let us open ourselves to God's wisdom and guidance trusting that God will lead us in the way of truth. Through hardship, affliction, and calamity, we trust in the transformative love of God to steady us. Prepare yourselves for a journey of the heart. Be open to the grace that enables your growth. With gratitude and wonder, receive the Divine Love in your minds and hearts and souls.

RESPONSIVE READING: Psalm 51: 1-15

P/ Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.

**C/ Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.**

P/ For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me.

**C/ Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight;
so you are right in your verdict
and justified when you judge.**

P/ Surely I was sinful at birth,
sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

**C/ Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb;
you taught me wisdom in that secret place.**

P/ Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

**C/ Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.**

P/ Hide your face from my sins
and blot out all my iniquity.

**C/ Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.**

P/ Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.

**C/ Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.**

P/ Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
so that sinners will turn back to you.

**C/ Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God,
you who are God my Savior,
and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.**

P/ Open my lips, Lord,
and my mouth will declare your praise.

CALL TO CONFESSION

C/ Gracious God...this is a difficult time. The focus of Lent is on the pain and suffering of Jesus and our own need for penitence. It is a time of gathering darkness. But we would rather skip this part and go straight to Easter. We would rather ignore the suffering—in you and in the world—and avoid the hard work of true self-examination. Forgive us for wanting this to be bright and painless and easy, when we know that Jesus did not take the easy way but chose the path of the Cross. Teach us the true meaning of penitence, so that we use this Lenten season to humbly seek a clean heart and a renewed spirit. We pray in the name Jesus Christ. Amen.

P/ The truth is this: God's love and mercy are never-ending. God knows us in our inward being; God cleanses us from our sins and shortcomings and restores to us the joy of salvation.

C/ Thanks be to God!

PRAYER OF THE DAY

P/ Gracious God, out of your love and mercy you breathed into dust the breath of life, creating us to serve you and our neighbors. Call forth our prayers and acts of kindness, and strengthen us to face our mortality with confidence in the mercy of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

P/ Amen.

+ WORD +

FIRST LESSON

Joel 2:1-2, 12-17

(Return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and compassionate.)

¹Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming, it is near- ²a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness! Like blackness spread upon the mountains a great and powerful army comes;

their like has never been from of old, nor will be again after them in ages to come.

¹²Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;¹³ 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.¹⁴ Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the Lord, your God? ¹⁵ Blow the trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly; ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ 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?'"

A/ The Word of the Lord.

C/ Thanks be to God.

SECOND LESSON

Romans 7:15; 17-19

(Breaking God's law; Turning toward sin)

¹⁵ I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. ¹⁷ As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. ¹⁸ For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature.^[a] For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.

A/ The Word of the Lord.

C/ Thanks be to God.

(Please stand.)

Re - turn to the Lord, your God, for he is gra - cious and
mer - ci - ful, slow to an - ger, and a - bound - ing in
stead - fast love, and a - bound - ing in stead - fast love.

GOSPEL

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

*(When you pray and fast, do not be like hypocrites.
"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.")*

P/ The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, the 6th chapter.

C/ Glory to You, O Lord!

⁶ “Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.”² “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.”³ But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,⁴ so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.⁵ “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.”⁶ 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.

¹⁶ “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.”¹⁷ But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face,¹⁸ 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.¹⁹ “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal;²⁰ but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal.”²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

P/ The Gospel of the Lord.

C/ Praise to You, O Christ!

SERMON: “What I Don’t Want to Do”

HYMN: “Just As I Am” (verses 1 & 6)

Just as I am, without one plea,
but that thy blood was shed for me,
and that thou bidd’st me come to thee,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am; thy love unknown
has broken ev’ry barrier down;
now to be thine, yea, thine alone,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

NICENE CREED

**We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.**

**We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father.**

Through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven;
by the power of the Holy Spirit
he became incarnate from the virgin Mary,
and was made man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.
With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified.
He has spoken through the prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen

PRAYERS

P/ As we return to the waters of baptism during this season of Lent, let us pray for the church, those in need, and all of God's creation. (*A brief silence.*)

P/ Help us return to you with all our hearts. Give us the will and the words to pray, in the assembly of believers and in the privacy of our rooms. God of mercy,

C/ hear our prayer.

P/ Teach us to treasure the earth you have made. Bring new life to rivers, oceans, and trees, and to all the animal species that are dying. God of mercy,

C/ hear our prayer.

P/ Now is the acceptable time for us to learn your way of peace. Plant peace in our hearts, in our homes, and in every nation, that it might sprout and flourish. God of mercy,

C/ hear our prayer.

P/ Grant comfort and endurance to all those who suffer from hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, sleepless nights, or hunger. Bring healing to the sick, and rest to the weary. God of mercy,

C/ hear our prayer.

P/ Center our congregation in the cross of Christ, the cross of ashes and rebirth. Take away any obstacles standing in the way of serving our neighbor. God of mercy,

C/ hear our prayer.

P/ As we remember the saints who have gone before us, fill us with hope for the day of salvation, when the ruins will be rebuilt, the streets restored, and the waters will never fail. God of mercy,

C/ hear our prayer.

P/ Into your hands, God of abundant grace, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy, through Jesus Christ, our Savior.

C/ Amen.

SHARING OF CHRIST'S PEACE

P/ The peace of the Lord be with you all.

C/ And also with you.

OFFERING PRAYER

A/ God our provider, you have not fed us with bread alone, but with words of grace and life. Bless us and these your gifts, which we receive from your bounty, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

C/ Amen.

LITURGY OF HOLY COMMUNION

P/ The Lord be with you.

C/ And also with you.

P/ Lift up your hearts.

C/ We lift them to the Lord.

P/ Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

C/ It is right to give Him thanks and praise.

P/ It is good, right, and salutary that we should at all times and in all places give thanks to You, holy Lord, almighty Father, everlasting God. You bid your people cleanse their hearts and prepare with joy for the paschal feast.

Renew our zeal in faith and life and bring us to the fullness of grace that belongs to the children of God.

WORDS OF INSTITUTION

P/ In the night in which He was betrayed our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks; broke it, and gave it to His disciples saying: Take and eat; this is My body, given for you. Do this in remembrance of Me.

Again, after supper, He took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it for all to drink, saying: This cup is the new covenant in My blood, shed for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this in remembrance of Me.

LORD'S PRAYER

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.**

**Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those**

who sin against us.

**Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.**

POST-COMMUNION PRAYER

P/ Compassionate God, you have fed us with the bread of heaven. Sustain us in our Lenten pilgrimage: may our fasting be hunger for justice, our alms, a making of peace, and our prayer, the song of grateful hearts; through Christ our Lord.

C/ Amen

BLESSING

P/ May God who has called us forth from the dust of the earth, and claimed us as children of the light, strengthen you on your journey into life renewed.

C/ Amen.

DISMISSAL

P/ Marked with the cross of Christ, go forth to love and serve the Lord.

C/ Thanks be to God.

CLOSING HYMN "Beneath The Cross of Jesus"

Beneath the cross of Jesus
I long to take my stand;
the shadow of a mighty rock
within a weary land,
a home within a wilderness,
a rest upon the way,
from the burning of the noontide heat
and burdens of the day.

Upon the cross of Jesus,
my eye at times can see
the very dying form of one
who suffered there for me.
And from my contrite heart, with tears,
two wonders I confess:
the wonder of his glorious love
and my unworthiness.

I take, O cross, your shadow
for my abiding place;
I ask no other sunshine than
the sunshine of his face;
content to let the world go by,
to know no gain nor loss,
my sinful self my only shame,
my glory all, the cross.

The minister and people exit in silence.