



# Ash Wednesday

## Distribution of Ashes in Schools

### ASH WEDNESDAY PREAMBLE

#### Introduction

The Hebrew People of the Old Testament understood that human life was short, and that all people eventually would become sick, grow old and die. They knew their lives were like the grass that grew in the fields and then faded away. They remembered that they were children of Adam and Eve. God made Adam and Eve from the dust of the earth and breathed life into them and cared for them like a good **Father** - **when** they lived by God's laws, they knew they would always be happy. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God, their life was not easy. They had to work hard, and eventually they died.

In the stories of the Old Testament, when the people disobeyed God, people called *prophets* called them to repent, to turn away from their sin, and to have a *change of heart*. In order to show they were repenting the people would put on clothes made from rough cloth **and** cover their heads with ashes; they would *fast* and pray for God's mercy.

#### Who can receive ashes?

On Ash Wednesday the procession to the altar is as diverse as we will ever see it! Mothers carrying babies, toddlers holding on to Dad's hand, teens, parishioners, neighbours, employees from nearby places of business, the elderly—we all come together to mark the beginning of Lent. Anyone, including non-Catholics, can receive ashes.

#### Preparation

- You may wish to use all or some of this material for the distribution of ashes in your school.
- Arrange with your parish priest to pick up the blessed ashes before the day of the ritual and distribution in your school.
- Have enough face masks for those distributing the ashes.
- Hand sanitizer for all those distributing ashes.



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### ASH WEDNESDAY RITUAL OUTSIDE MASS

#### Gathering Song

Hosea (*Come back to Me*):

As One Voice 1 #30; Catholic Worship Book #715; Gather Australia #213.

#### Introduction

Ash Wednesday begins our forty-day season of Lent that leads to Easter. On Ash Wednesday, we come together like the people of the Old Testament to remind ourselves that we do not always follow God's ways and that we need to ask for God's mercy and forgiveness. Like God's people in the time of the prophets, we wear ashes to show that we want to turn away from whatever keeps us from God, and to have a change of heart, so that we can live in peace and in joy with God and with each other.

#### Greeting

**Leader:** Let us begin our prayer marked by the sign of our faith:

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit

**All:** Amen.

#### Opening Prayer

**Leader:** Let us pray.

God of Love and forgiveness.

Heal us from the sadness we feel when we have sinned  
by thinking only of ourselves.

Guide us with your love and forgive us for the times  
we have not listened to your words with our heart.

We make this prayer in Jesus name.

**All:** Amen.

**Leader:** Let us now listen to a reading from Scripture.



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### Gospel Reading

Matthew 6: 1-6, 16-18

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

Jesus said to his disciples:

"When you do good deeds, don't try to show off.

If you do, you won't get a reward from your Father in heaven.

"When you give to the poor, don't blow a loud horn.

That's what show-offs do in the meeting places and on the street corners, because they are always looking for praise.

I promise you that they already have their reward.

"When you give to the poor, don't let anyone know about it.

Then your gift will be given in secret.

Your Father knows what is done in secret, and he will reward you.

"When you pray, don't be like those show-offs who love to stand up and pray in the meeting places and on the street corners.

They do this just to look good.

I promise you that they already have their reward.

"When you pray, go into a room alone and close the door.

Pray to your Father in private.

He knows what is done in private, and he will reward you.

"When you go without eating, don't try to look gloomy as those show-offs do when they go without eating.

I promise you that they already have their reward.

"Instead, comb your hair and wash your face.

Then others won't know that you are going without eating.

But your Father sees what is done in private, and he will reward you."

The Gospel of the Lord.

**All:** Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.



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### Reflection

Following in the footsteps of Christ during Lent [Suggested reflection]

From our Jewish roots we learn the importance of caring for the poor. We teach the importance of giving to those in need and sharing resources, and we teach how to choose who will receive the resources that we share. Jesus also teaches us about the importance of prayer. Jesus prays seventeen times in the Gospels; he models prayer for us today. In the Scriptures Jesus prays often, morning and night. He prays during critical events in his life and he prays before ministering to people in need. Lent calls us to follow in the footsteps of Christ. Ashes mark the beginning of our walk.

During Lent we are also encouraged to fast or give up something during the weeks of Lent. By fasting we are making a sacrifice as that thing that we choose to give up might be something we really like [give appropriate examples]. This is a reminder to us of Jesus' sacrifice when he died on the cross for us.

Pope Francis (Ash Wednesday 2017) reflects on other ways we might fast.

[Depending on the age of the students you might use the reflection on fasting below or adjust the wording for better understanding.]

Fast from hurtful words and speak kind words.

Fast from sadness and be filled with gratitude.

Fast from anger and be filled with patience.

Fast from pessimism and be filled with hope.

Fast from worries and have trust in God.

Fast from complaints and contemplate simplicity.

Fast from pressures and be prayerful.

Fast from bitterness and fill your heart with joy.

Fast from selfishness and be compassionate.

Fast from grudges and be reconciled.

Fast from words and be silent so that you can listen.



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### Distribution of Ashes

**Leader:** Loving God,  
we gather in your presence on this Ash Wednesday,  
to seek your forgiveness  
and to ask your help in living our lives better.

For the times when we have not noticed the needs of other.  
Jesus forgive us.

For the times when we have refused to forgive.  
Jesus forgive us.

These ashes are a sign of our desire to say sorry.  
Jesus forgive us.

These ashes are a sign of our sorrow.  
Lord, make them a sign to the world of our desire to change,  
and to follow in the footsteps of Jesus your Son.

**Leader:** “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”  
or  
“Ask forgiveness and always love others as Jesus did.”

### Sprinkling of Ashes

- Gentle music could be played as the ashes are distributed.
- Cleanse your hands before the distribution of the ashes.
- Put on a face mask if not already wearing one.
- Invite students to move forward to receive ashes.
- Arrange for staff to monitor social distancing where appropriate.
- Once the student or teacher is in front of you take some of the ashes and sprinkle it over their head without saying anything.



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### Universal Prayer

**Leader:** Having been fed by God's Word and having received the ashes of repentance let us now bring our prayers before the Lord.

The response to our petitions is: Renew our Hearts, O Lord.

1. Let us pray for the all people throughout the world.  
May Jesus' message of forgiveness be planted in their hearts through the example of others. Response: Renew our Hearts, O Lord.
2. Let us pray for peace.  
As people who have received the ashes of forgiveness may we be signs of peace in our community. Response: Renew our Hearts, O Lord.
3. Let us pray for those who are sick at this time.  
May they find strength in the knowledge that we are praying for them. Response: Renew our Hearts, O Lord.
4. Let us pray for each other.  
May we be people who strive to live as followers of Jesus and always be ready to ask forgiveness of those we may hurt. Response: Renew our Hearts, O Lord.
5. Let us spend a moment in silence, heads bowed and pray for those we love.  
Response: Renew our Hearts, O Lord.

**Leader:** Let us gather these intentions and those held in the silence of our hearts, uniting them with the prayer of Jesus, using the words he gave us:  
Our Father...



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### Closing Prayer

Let us pray:

Merciful God,

You created us from the dust of the earth,  
and breathed your own life into our very being.

You recreated us in Christ through the waters of Baptism,  
may our fasting strengthen us to seek your justice,  
may our prayer lead us to become makers of peace,  
and may our sharing sow seeds of your presence in our hearts,  
as we await with joyful anticipation the resurrection of Jesus your Son.  
We make this prayer to you in his name.

All: Amen.

Leader: And may almighty God bless us: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

Leader: Let us go in the peace of Christ.

All: Thanks be to God.

### Closing Song

Ashes (*We rise again from ashes*):

As One Voice 2 #16; Gather Australia #209.