

# **Ash Wednesday Service**

**St. Christopher-by-the-Sea  
Gibson Island, Maryland  
February 17, 2021**

## Ash Wednesday Service

### Welcome

### Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing you have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

### Lesson – Joel 2:12-19

“Even now,” declares the Lord, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.” Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity. Who knows? He may turn and have pity and leave behind a blessing – grain offerings and drink offerings for the Lord your God. Blow the trumpet in Zion, declare a holy fast, call a sacred assembly. Gather the people, consecrate the assembly; bring together the elders, gather the children, those nursing at the breast. Let the bridegroom leave his room and the bride her chamber. Let the priests, who minister before the Lord, weep between the temple porch and the altar. Let them say, “Spare your people, O Lord. Do not make your inheritance an object of scorn, a byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, ‘Where is their God?’” Then the Lord will be jealous for his land and take pity on his people. The Lord will reply to them: “I am sending you grain, new wine and oil, enough to satisfy you fully, never again will I make you an object of scorn to the nations.”

### Invitation

Dear People of God: The first Christians observed with great devotion the days of our Lord’s passion and resurrection, and it became the custom of the Church to prepare for them by a season of penitence and fasting. This season of Lent provided a time in which converts to the faith were prepared for Holy Baptism.

It was also a time when those, who, because of notorious sins, had been separated from the body of the faithful were reconciled by penitence and forgiveness, and restored to the fellowship of the church. Thereby, the whole congregation was put in mind of the message of pardon and absolution set forth in the Gospel of our Savior, and of the need which all Christians continually have to renew their repentance and faith. I invite you, therefore, in the name of the Church, to the observance of a holy Lent, by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God's holy Word. And, to make a right beginning of repentance, and as a mark of our mortal nature, let us now kneel before the Lord, our maker and redeemer.

### **Distribution of 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, that we may remember that it is only by your gracious gift that we are given everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Savior. *Amen.*

### **Psalm 51**

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your loving-kindness;  
in your great compassion blot out my offences.

Wash me through and through from my wickedness  
and cleanse me from my sin.

For I know my transgressions,  
and my sin is ever before me.

Against you only have I sinned  
and done what is evil in your sight.

And so you are justified when you speak  
and upright in your judgment.

Indeed, I have been wicked from my birth,  
a sinner from my mother's womb.

For behold, you look for truth deep within me,  
and will make me understand wisdom secretly.

Purge me from my sin, and I shall be pure;  
wash me, and I shall be clean indeed.

Make me hear of joy and gladness,  
that the body you have broken may rejoice.  
Hide your face from my sins  
and blot out all my iniquities.  
Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
and renew a right spirit within me.  
Cast me not away from your presence  
and take not your holy Spirit from me.  
Give me the joy of your saving help again  
and sustain me with your bountiful Spirit.  
I shall teach your ways to the wicked,  
and sinners shall return to you.  
Deliver me from death, O God,  
and my tongue shall sing of your righteousness, O God of my salvation.  
Open my lips, O Lord,  
and my mouth shall proclaim your praise.  
Had you desired it, I would have offered sacrifice;  
but you take no delight in burnt offerings.  
The sacrifice of God is a troubled spirit;  
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

### **Litany of Penitence**

Most holy and merciful Father:  
We confess to you and to one another,  
and to the whole communion of saints  
in heaven and on earth,  
that we have sinned by our own fault  
in thought, word, and deed;  
by what we have done, and by what we have left undone.

We have not loved you with our whole heart, and mind, and strength. We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We have not forgiven others, as we have been forgiven.

*Have mercy on us, Lord.*

We have been deaf to your call to serve, as Christ served us. We have not been true to the mind of Christ. We have grieved your Holy Spirit.  
*Have mercy on us, Lord.*

We confess to you, Lord, all our past unfaithfulness: the pride, hypocrisy, and impatience of our lives.  
*We confess to you, Lord.*

Our self-indulgent appetites and ways, and our exploitation of other people,  
*We confess to you, Lord.*

Our anger at our own frustration, and our envy of those more fortunate than ourselves,  
*We confess to you, Lord.*

Our intemperate love of worldly good and comforts, and our dishonesty in daily life and work,  
*We confess to you, Lord.*

Our negligence in prayer and worship and our failure to commend the faith that is in us,  
*We confess to you, Lord.*

Accept our repentance, Lord, for the wrongs we have done; for our blindness to human need and suffering, and our indifference to injustice and cruelty,  
*Accept our repentance, Lord.*

For all false judgments, for uncharitable thoughts toward our neighbors, and for our prejudice and contempt toward those who differ from us,  
*Accept our repentance, Lord.*

For our waste and pollution of your creation, and our lack of concern for those who come after us,  
*Accept our repentance, Lord.*

Restore us, good Lord, and let your anger depart from us:  
*Favorably hear us, for your mercy is great.*

Accomplish in us the work of your salvation,  
*That we may show forth your glory in the world.*

By the cross and passion of your Son our Lord,  
*Bring us with all you saints to the joy of his resurrection.*

### **Absolution**

Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who desires not the death of sinners, but rather that they may turn from their wickedness and live, has given power and commandment to his ministers to declare and pronounce to his people, being penitent, the absolution and remission of their sins. He pardons and absolves all those who truly repent, and with sincere hearts believe his holy gospel.

Therefore we beseech him to grant us true repentance and his Holy Spirit, that those things may please him which we do on this day, and that the rest of our life hereafter may be pure and holy, so that at the last we may come to his eternal joy; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

### **Dismissal**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.  
*Thanks be to God.*

## **To the person who will impose ashes:**

Thank you for sharing with those you love the powerful symbol of Sacrifice.

## **Here's is an introduction to use in your homes.**

The Sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross is more than an historical moment. It is a model of behavior. We can sacrifice also. If not our lives, then our best efforts to help others. People do it every day in all sorts of ways. You probably do it yourself in ways you don't realize. Even modest sacrifices are helpful. You will be surprised at the good feeling that comes with self-sacrifice.

## **Then offer this prayer:**

Dear Lord, on this Ash Wednesday, we are mindful of our mixed record of loving our neighbor. We have done some things well, and others things not so well. We know we can do better, and are grateful for yet another chance to do so. Give us strength to tackle tough jobs, and your assurance that giving our best is acceptable to you. We are especially grateful for your Son Jesus who gave his life for us. In thanksgiving for his sacrifice and his new life, we promise to give our best in the days ahead. In Jesus' Name, we pray. *Amen.*

**Then explain** that, as you share the ashes, you will say, **“The Lord be with you.”** To which the recipient can respond, **“And also with you.”**

**Thank you for your participation and leadership.**

## Ash Wednesday Remarks 2021

The purpose of Ash Wednesday is to get ourselves ready for another year of living out our Faith, of being the kind of people our Lord would like us to be, and indeed expects us to be.

The assumption is that there is room for improvement. We tried to improve last year, with partial success, but probably not the success that we would like and that our Lord would expect.

If we were giving ourselves a grade, it probably wouldn't be an A, and it might not be a B. Maybe some version of a C. A good year would be C+. A not so good year would be a C-.

Remember that we are grading improvement. Maybe this past year we did pretty well in meeting our Lord's expectations and our own. Maybe it was a B year. So, if we're committed to improvement, we're now hoping for a B+ year or maybe even an A- year. We're trying to do a better job each and every year.

So, the first calculation we need to make is to acknowledge the kind of year we have had. Did we do better, the same, or worse than the year before? And we want to make sure that we are honest in our calculation. Deceiving God is not an option.

Once we've assessed the year past, we can make plans for the year ahead. Ash Wednesday as preparation is good for the soul, at least if we, not only point ourselves in a healthy direction, but actually pursue that direction.

As we conduct this assessment and set and pursue goals, we need to remember a couple of things.

First, we need to be our own best friend. We need to really want the improvement. We need to keep our heads up, our spirits up, and our efforts up. We know we can do better, even if we are already doing pretty well. We need to build on what has worked, and continue to resist what isn't healthy.

And second, we need to remember that Jesus is by our side. And not just as an observer, but also as a helper. He has a stake in how well we do. He will remind and point out and urge, but he won't do the work for us. Our effort is our responsibility. But, make no mistake, he wants us on the plus side of things, not the minus side. He will even forgive setbacks as long as we see that forgiveness as the incredible gift it is.

So, here we are, ready to give life another shot, another year. Isn't it great that we even get second chances. Thank God for room to grow. And thank God for assisting us in utilizing this room, this space, this life.

In one sense, Ash Wednesday and Lent are tough times. We come face to face with ourselves. But, in another sense, the sense that we promote right here is that, while challenging, this Season is a great opportunity for the kind of growth that we want and that will benefit those we love and those in need.

There is a change this year in how we will administer the ashes. Instead of you coming forward and having the minister make the sign of the cross on your forehead, I will come to you and offer an envelope which contains a statement of purpose and a prayer, plus a small bag of ashes for you to self-administer and/or administer to your family at a time you select.

We have made a similar adjustment for baptism, the purpose of which is to limit the physical contact of persons outside the family with those inside. We make a similar adjustment at baptism. Instead of the minister holding the child and administering the water, the parent holds the child and administers the water.

These adjustments can actually add to the meaning of the service, which we trust is the experience later this evening or whenever you choose to share the ashes.

May our experience this Lent once again be a source of promise and progress and comfort. Remaining seated, let us pray.