

Ash Wednesday

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent. On this day we begin our Lenten journey to Easter. It is one of two fast days in the church year.



On Ash Wednesday the priest blesses the ashes. These ashes are made from the palms which were blessed on Palm Sunday last year. Ash Wednesday is not a Holy Day of Obligation but many people attend church on this day to be marked with the sign of the cross. Ashes are an ancient symbol of repentance; penitents wore 'sackcloth and ashes' to show that they were in need of forgiveness and that term is still in common usage today. Ashes also remind us that our life on earth will come to an end and that our eternal life with God will then begin. This is what we believe happens in baptism and so the beginning of our Lenten journey is inextricably linked to our baptismal journey.

The sign of the cross is made as the ashes are put on our foreheads. The priest or the minister says '*Repent, and believe in the Gospel,*' or similar words. The signing with ashes reminds us of our dying to the old way of life in baptism and challenges us to live our lives in the light of faith.

PREPARING A SERVICE OF ASHES

What follows is offered as a suggestion to parishes for a short service of ashes. It could be used to facilitate people to receive ashes who otherwise may not have the opportunity to do so: for example, people limited to a lunch break, people dropping their children to school, factory shift workers.... It could take place in a church, school prayer room or other suitable setting.

This service can be led by an ordained minister or by a **delegated lay minister**. The actual blessing of ashes, which can be done ahead of this service, is always reserved to the ordained. Lay ministers may assist in the distribution of ashes.

Because of the nature of this service it is recommended that the ashes used have been already blessed during an earlier parish celebration of the Eucharist.

This service is not offered as a replacement for a parish Eucharistic celebration of distribution of ashes but as an additional opportunity to distribute ashes to the wider community.

MINISTERS NEEDED FOR THIS SERVICE:

- Priest/Prayer leader
- Reader
- Adequate numbers of people to distribute ashes.
- (Music minister – for example for during the distribution of ashes)

SET UP:

- Lectionary open on Ambo for reading: (lectionary I, p. 192/193)
- Prayer leaders book by his/her chair.
- Enough stations for distribution of ashes and enough suitable containers with blessed ashes for distribution.
- Towels and water (or wipes) for ministers to clean hands afterwards.
- Microphone for leader & reader (& music minister if present).

SERVICE OF ASHES



GREETING:

LEADER: On this first day of Lent, as we begin our journey back to the waters of Easter baptism, let us stand and mark ourselves with the sign of our faith: In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

OPENING PRAYER:

LEADER: Father,
Through our observance of Lent
help us to understand the meaning
of your Son's death and resurrection,
and teach us to reflect it in our lives.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. **AMEN.**

LEADER: Please be seated as we listen to the word of God...

READING: Corinthians 5:20-6:2 (Lectionary I, page 192)

"Be reconciled to God...now is the favourable time" *or*

Matthew 6:1-6. 16-18 (Lectionary I, Page 193)

"Your Father, who sees all this is done in secret, will reward you."

INVITATION TO A MOMENT OF SILENCE:

LEADER: Let us reflect on these words in a moment of silence, as we prepare ourselves to receive the sign of our Lenten journey...

DISTRIBUTION OF ASHES:

LEADER: Will those who are to distribute the blessed ashes please come forward.

These words accompany the signing of the cross with ashes on the forehead: "Repent, and believe in the Gospel" or "Remember that you dust, and to dust you shall return". Ministers come forward, are signed by the leader and then promptly take ashes to their station. Music ministers, if available, may lead some music at this stage. As distribution is completed, ministers wash their hands and return to their places.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION:

LEADER: On this first day of Lent let us bring our prayers to God who is rich in mercy and abundant in goodness.

For the Church in Ireland, that this Lenten season will offer us an opportunity for healing and change. We pray to the Lord.

For those in leadership in our country, that they will work for the good of the weakest and poorest in our society. We pray to the Lord.

For Trócaire, our Catholic agency working with the world's poor and vulnerable, that it will continue to be supported in the work it does. We pray to the Lord

**For those in our community suffering illness, bereavement and loss, that this time of Lent will be a season of hope and comfort.
We pray to the Lord**

For those who have died and who now sleep in Christ. We pray to the Lord.

OUR FATHER:

LEADER: In Christ we are one. Together we stand & pray the prayer that he gave us...Our Father

CLOSING PRAYER:

LEADER: Loving God,
as we make our Lenten journey back to you
remain with us and guide us in the days ahead.
Help us to recognise and accept your constant care for us
As we seek to deepen our faith and receive your mercy.
We make this our prayer through Christ our Lord. **AMEN.**

DISMISSAL: LEADER: And may God bless us and keep us as we leave this place and continue our journey of Lent. In the name of the Father, and of ...**AMEN.**

(Prayer leader leaves his/her place immediately)

SUGGESTIONS FOR REACHING OUT FROM THE ASH WEDNESDAY MASS

In a spirit of reaching out, parishes might consider bringing ashes for distribution from a parish Eucharistic celebration to alternative locations/opportunities within the parish.

Alternative opportunities include, for example, a shopping centre, a nursing home, a local factory, a non-Eucharistic service of ashes in the parish church/school/nursing home...

It is recommended that where parishioners are going to a venue such as a shopping centre, a suitable place is prepared for the distribution of ashes. This place might include a display with the Trócaire posters, a parish cross, and suitable containers for distributing ashes. On a practical note; have some envelopes for people who want to bring home ashes and have a good supply of wipes to clean hands.

This initiative also offers an opportunity to Reach Out to people with other information from the parish, for example, a parish information sheet, a menu of parish Lenten activities, Trócaire boxes...

What follows is a model of a rite for sending ministers from the parish Mass on Ash Wednesday to distribute ashes in an alternative venue.



RITE OF SENDING FORTH OF MINISTERS

When the prayer after communion has been prayed, the presider invites ministers who are going to distribute ashes in an alternative venue to come forward in these or similar words...

On this day we have begun our Lenten season together.

In a moment we will leave this place bearing the sign of the journey we are undertaking.

Before we do this, members of our parish are going to leave here with blessed ashes that will be distributed in _____ (details can be given at this point.)

I now ask those people who are undertaking this action of reaching out, to come forward.

Any of the participating ministers who are present at the Mass come forward and stand before the presider. The presider holds the container with the blessed Ashes as he says the following or similar words:

My dear friends,

On behalf of this community I send you to bring these ashes to others, as an invitation to begin the Lenten journey.

As you go forth in our name, may you know our care and support.

The presider hands the bowl to one of the ministers and then, with hands extended, says to all of them:

And may God bless you and keep you as you seek to do God's will.

Ministers leave the church together.

The liturgy then concludes as normal.