

Prayer Ritual for Ash Wednesday OUTLINE of Ritual

We Gather:

Welcome
Gathering Song
Ritual Greeting & Sign of the Cross
Introduction to Ash Wednesday
Opening Prayer

We Listen:

Scripture Readings X3
Reflection on the Scripture
and on our Lenten practice
Sharing

We Respond:

Invitation to Ritual Action
Distribution of Ashes
Lord's Prayer
Sign of Peace
Closing Prayer

We Go Forth:

Blessing
Dismissal

You will need:

- ✓ a Leader; Readers X 3
- ✓ words of the song; CD and player; a person to organise the music
- ✓ texts for each Reader (arranged in a folder); full text for Leader (in a separate folder)
- ✓ a small bowl of ashes; a person to distribute the ashes
- ✓ you may like to share the leadership between two people if this works best for you!

Prayer Ritual for Ash Wednesday

We Gather

Welcome & Introduction

In Leader's own words ... (informal)

Gathering Song

Ritual Greeting & Sign of the Cross

Leader: Blessed be Christ Jesus, Who bore our sins in his body on the cross, That we might be encouraged to die to sin and live in right relationship. We bless ourselves in the name of the Father...

All: In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Introduction

Leader: We gather today to celebrate God's abundant mercy. We come, admitting that we are constantly in need of mercy and forgiveness. Today we will express this by being signed with the Cross of Jesus Christ in ashes on our foreheads ... and so declare to the rest of the world our willingness to change and turn again towards the Gospel values that Jesus taught.

Let us pray for the grace to keep Lent faithfully ... (pause a few seconds ...)

Lighting of the 3 Candles

Leader: We light our 3 candles, to remind us of the members of our Armed Forces who served in the defence of our country on land, sea, and sky.

A member of the group lights the candles in the centre of the prayer space.

Opening Prayer

Leader: Spirit of God, who led Jesus into the desert to fast and pray, lead us as we enter this time of Lent. Give us courage to scrutinise our hearts with honesty; Give us strength to deal with what we find; Give us love to forgive ourselves and each other, So that, in peace and joy, we may celebrate at Easter The death and resurrection of Jesus And all that it means for each of us. We make this prayer through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

We Listen

Reader 1: *from the prophet Joel (Joel 2: 13)*
Return to the Lord, your God,
for God is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love,
and relents from punishing.

PAUSE ...

Reader 2: *from Paul to the Church in Corinth (2Cor 5: 20-21)*
We are ambassadors for Christ,
as though God were making the appeal directly through us.
Therefore, we implore you in Christ's name: be reconciled to God.

PAUSE ...

Reader 3: *from the gospel of Matthew (Matt 6: 2-4)*
 When you do acts of kindness, don't have it trumpeted before you; that is what hypocrites do in the synagogues and the streets, that they may be praised by others. The truth is, they've already received their reward in full. But when you do acts of kindness, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing; your good deeds must be done in secret, and your God – who sees all that is done in secret – will repay you.

PAUSE ...

Leader: How many of us have grown up with the image of a God who judges us harshly? who is stern and unbending? who demands the impossible and takes all the 'life' out of us?

This Lent, we are invited to change our image of God. The God we see in these Scripture readings is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, not judgemental at all! This God actually 'relents' from punishing! This God invites us into the fullness of life!

We are asked to be 'ambassadors' for this kind of God during Lent. As we enter this period of 'fasting', let us fast from the things that muddy our focus on God's abundant love. Perhaps we could fast from making unkind judgements or comments about each other, or about the children – and 'feast' on saying something that builds up and encourages instead. Doing this would truly reflect to everyone around us that our God abounds in 'steadfast love'.

Sharing

Would anyone like to offer a comment or insight? ...

a few minutes are allowed for sharing ... *Group members respond in pairs and/or with the whole group as they are comfortable.*

We Respond

Invitation to Ritual Action

Leader: Friends, as we receive the ashes on our foreheads, we affirm that in the life cycle, we are continually dying to the old ways and rising to newness. Though change is sometimes difficult, our faith helps us to break through what seems like disaster - to live with new life. May we all find that new life as we journey to Easter!

As these ashes are placed on our heads, Let it be a sign of our repentance and our willingness to change our lives for the better.

All pause for silent prayer ...

Distribution of Ashes

One of the group has been designated to take charge of the ashes at this moment during the Ritual Prayer. S/he now moves forward, takes the bowl of ashes, and invites each person to move out from their place individually (not in line) as follows:

Person with ashes: Let us take some time now to be signed with ashes. I invite you to come forward, one at a time to receive the ashes. While EACH person is being signed with ashes, let us hold them in prayer, asking for courage and strength as they enter the journey of transformation this Lent.

While the others hold that person in prayer, s/he traces the sign of the cross on the person's forehead, saying:

Person with ashes: Out of the ashes of your life, you will rise. Turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel.

The Lord's Prayer

Leader: We pray now in the words that Jesus taught us:

**All: Our Father, who art in heaven,
Hallowed by 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. Amen**

Sign of Peace

Leader: Let us offer each other a sign of peace ...

All: Peace be with you!

Closing Prayer

Leader: Let us pray ... *(pause for silent prayer)*
Abundant God,
May your healing love turn us from sin
And keep us on the way that leads to you.
We ask this in the name of Jesus the Lord.

All: Amen

We Go Forth*Blessing*

Leader: May the God who loves us so generously keep us from all harm and bless us with every good gift.

All: AMEN!

Leader: May God's Word be in our hearts and fill us with lasting joy.

All: AMEN!

Leader: May almighty God bless us all in the name of the Father,
+ and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

All: AMEN!

Dismissal

Leader: Nourished by God's Word, go in peace to love and serve.

All: Thanks be to God!

Sign of Peace

Leader: Grateful for the freedom that we know today,
Let us offer each other a Sign of Peace. ...