

Wednesday 2 March 2022

Ash Wednesday



Ashes are an ancient sign of penitence; from the Middle Ages it became the custom to begin Lent by being marked in ash with the sign of the cross. Calculations of the forty days has varied considerably in Christian history. It is now usual in the West to count them continuously to the end of Holy Week (not including Sundays), so beginning Lent on the sixth Wednesday before Easter, Ash Wednesday.

Liturgical dress is the simplest possible. Churches are kept bare of flowers and decoration. The *Gloria* is never used.

Sermon © Revd Dr Paul Monk.

Liturgy and prayers of intercession © 2000 The Archbishops' Council.

Bible readings © the publishers of the NRSV translation.

- The liturgy assumes the service is Eucharistic. The prayers of consecration appear included at the end.
- The hymns are YouTube links. To hear the hymns please hover the mouse over each link, press Ctrl and then return.
- To see service transcripts from previous weeks, please visit the page, <http://www.medlockhead.co.uk/resources/index.htm>

Introduction and welcome

HYMN 1 Let all mortal flesh keep silence [\(click on this link to hear the hymn\)](#)

The Welcome

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

All Amen.

The Lord be with you

All And also with you.

Introduction

Brothers and sisters in Christ, since early days Christians have observed with great devotion the time of our Lord's passion and resurrection and prepared for this by a season of penitence and fasting.

By carefully keeping these days, Christians take to heart the call to repentance and the assurance of forgiveness proclaimed in the gospel, and so grow in faith and in devotion to our Lord.

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.

**All Holy God,
holy and strong,
holy and immortal,
have mercy upon us.**

The Collect for Ash Wednesday

Let us pray for grace to keep Lent faithfully.

Silence

Almighty and everlasting God,
you hate nothing that you have made
and forgive the sins of all those who are penitent:
create and make in us new and contrite hearts
that we, worthily lamenting our sins
and acknowledging our wretchedness,
may receive from you, the God of all mercy,
perfect remission and forgiveness;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,

who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

All Amen.

First reading

A reading from the book of the Prophet Isaiah

Shout out, do not hold back!

Lift up your voice like a trumpet!

Announce to my people their rebellion,
to the house of Jacob their sins.

Yet day after day they seek me
and delight to know my ways,

as if they were a nation that practised righteousness
and did not forsake the ordinance of their God;

they ask of me righteous judgements,
they delight to draw near to God.

'Why do we fast, but you do not see?

Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?'

Look, you serve your own interest on your fast-day,
and oppress all your workers.

Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight
and to strike with a wicked fist.

Such fasting as you do today
will not make your voice heard on high.

Is such the fast that I choose,
a day to humble oneself?

Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush,
and to lie in sackcloth and ashes?

Will you call this a fast,
a day acceptable to the Lord?

Is not *this* the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,

to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?

Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,

and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover them,
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?
Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up quickly;
your vindicator shall go before you,
the glory of the Lord shall be your rear-guard.
Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;
you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.

If you remove the yoke from among you,
the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,
if you offer your food to the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,
then your light shall rise in the darkness
and your gloom be like the noonday.

The Lord will guide you continually,
and satisfy your needs in parched places,
and make your bones strong;
and you shall be like a watered garden,
like a spring of water,
whose waters never fail.

Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;
you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;
you shall be called the repairer of the breach,
the restorer of streets to live in. *Isaiah 58:1-12*

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

Second reading

A reading from St Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians

We entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made himself to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. For he says,

'At an acceptable time I have listened to you,
and on a day of salvation I have helped you.'

See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation!

We are putting no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labours, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; in honour and dishonour, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see—we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything. *2 Corinthians 5:20b—6:10*

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

HYMN 2 Purify my heart

[\(please click on this link to hear the hymn\)](#)

Gospel reading

Praise to you, O Christ, King of eternal glory.

The Lord is a great God, O that today you would listen to his voice.

Harden not your hearts. *cf. Psalm 95:3, 8*

All Praise to you, O Christ, King of eternal glory.

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John

All Glory to you O Lord.

Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.

Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, they said to him, 'Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?' They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground.

When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, 'Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.' And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him.

Jesus straightened up and said to her, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' She said, 'No one, sir.' And Jesus said, 'Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.' *John 8:1-11*

This is the Gospel of the Lord

All Praise to you O Christ.

Sermon

I wonder if you've heard about the recent food scare? In a fast food shop in town, they found a burger that contained a vitamin.

Today—Ash Wednesday—is the day when we come before God in order to kick-start our penitential Lenten observances. In that context, some of us will start to think seriously about the Lenten fast. But isn't it sad that then the word's 'fast' and 'food' come together, we automatically think of *Subway* rather than the Lord's way?

Fasting means, literally, to give up food. But the Lenten fast has never been wholly about food and giving up eating it. For example, we have sackcloth on the altar and, shortly, we'll wear ashes on our foreheads. So, at the start, as we talk about the Lenten fast, can I make a plea that you don't just give up chocolate for Lent, because it will also help you to lose weight? The fast of Lent is not designed to help us lose weight. Nor is it to make us look more physically attractive. Jesus was very clear that fasting is to be done in secret. Look at Matthew chapter 6.

Today's reading from Isaiah says that whatever we do as a religious observance, whatever we give up or take on, should be done in a joined-up way. To that end, Isaiah demonstrates the ways that inappropriate fasting—doing without food *only* for the sake of doing without food—can harm a proud spirit. The people he saw *were* fasting but they continued sinning as brazenly as before. Perhaps their fasting was motivated by a desire to please self or some other ulterior motive; we simply don't know. But they gave up food and did not give up the more serious sins.

And please notice from the passage how *all* the serious sins that Isaiah uses to illustrate his point concern the way we can treat other people as slaves, as a means to an end, as collateral, as *things* placed there merely for our own convenience.

Growth in prayer is actually quite easy, because ease of prayer is a by-product of our spirituality. Provided our spirituality is God-centred, we will find it easy to grow in pray and to grow in our understanding of prayer. But if our spirituality is primarily 'me' centred, at the very least we will find prayer difficult and, maybe, even irrelevant. To grow in prayer therefore means to grow into a form of spirituality that manages to marginalise self and thereby enable God to take the place previously held by 'me' at the centre.

And *that's* why we fast during Lent. We fast to 'develop our spiritual muscles', to discipline the soul so that when temptation does come our way (as it will), the soul possess the necessary skill and stamina to respond appropriately. So we give up something for Lent in order to change, to develop spiritually.

So how do we discipline the soul? Isaiah dangles before us, carrot-like before our gaze, a very potent means of growing spiritually. And it's all about justice, and about peace, and about the way we treat people.

Isaiah knew, as we in modern Britain have largely forgotten, that all people are interconnected, inter-related, on the spiritual level: if *I* sin then *you* will feel its impact; it will diminish you in a spiritual way. If *you* sin, *I* will find it more difficult not to sin when *I'm* tempted. As soon as we've learnt this simple truth, we see that each time we commit a sin—however small it seems—we also influence the rest of humankind. Because we are all spiritually interconnected, each time we collude with those who oppress the poor, work against peace, against justice, we also harm ourselves spiritually, as well as harming them physically. It's a restatement of the obvious spiritual truth, that each time we sin, we will find it far harder to pray.

A pair of examples: next time you're in one of the big supermarkets, look at the jeans. You can buy a pair of jeans for £3. They look nice. But simple common sense says you cannot *make* a pair of jeans for £3. In fact, they've generally been made by political prisoners in, say, China—people who are slaves for their political or religious beliefs. That £3 pair of jeans could have been made by a Chinese person enslaved for being a Christian. And yet we say, 'Good! they're cheap.' We perpetuate the crime against human rights to look cool; and harm ourselves spiritually.

And the consequences? I will find prayer difficult if I want to learn to pray but insist on buying jeans I know are made by slaves, because I've harmed my own soul.

Again, if I buy coffee or chocolate that's not fairly traded, I not only perpetuate harm against the people who manufacture them and are likely to be slaves (or treated as slaves) but I also harm my own soul. In each case, not only do we show our spirituality is bogus, but we impair our spiritual lives.

It's into this context that Isaiah says, if you want to grow in holiness, if you want to grow in spiritual strength and prayer, then work toward justice, work toward peace, if only through the everyday things that you do with your purse and wallet. In fact, St Peter got there first, when he says, 'Show me your faith and I'll show you my works: true faith is demonstrated in works.' That's surely also what the reading from 2 Corinthians is talking about.

Some folk will say, 'But I don't have the money to buy fair trade, etc.!' Part of this same argument involves campaigning for fair wages for all our friends. *God wants us to seek His Kingdom as a benefit for everyone. All will see its fruit.*

Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Early in the morning he came again to the temple. And all the people came to him. He sat down and began to teach them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought to him a woman caught buying three fashion tops for £10. And making her stand before all of them, they said to him, 'Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing injustice.'

Even as they were speaking, they brought to him a man who sought to buy food in a fast-food restaurant well known to refuse their workers the right to join a union, and dock their wages for uniforms and other non-essential items.

And as they were speaking, yet a third person was brought to Jesus, who knowingly bought fruit that was grown in the Holy Land on land confiscated at gunpoint from destitute Palestinian peasants by the Israeli Government, in blatant contravention of at least sixteen UN resolutions

Jesus looked up at these three people, and had compassion on them. Having written in the dust with his finger, he said 'I know you and I love you. I want you to grow in spirituality. I want you to know my loving heavenly Father through prayer. So go, and sin no more.'

Self-examination and Confession

Let us now call to mind our sin and the infinite mercy of God.

God the Father,

All have mercy on us.

God the Son,

All have mercy on us.

God the Holy Spirit,

All have mercy on us.

Trinity of love,

All have mercy on us.

From all evil and mischief;
from pride, vanity, and hypocrisy;
from envy, hatred, and malice;
and from all evil intent,

All good Lord, deliver us.

From sloth, worldliness and love of money;
from hardness of heart
and contempt for your word and your laws,

All good Lord, deliver us.

From sins of body and mind;
from the deceits of the world, the flesh and the devil,

All good Lord, deliver us.

In all times of sorrow;
in all times of joy;
in the hour of death,
and at the day of judgement,

All good Lord, deliver us.

By the mystery of your holy incarnation;
by your birth, childhood and obedience;
by your baptism, fasting and temptation,

All good Lord, deliver us.

By your ministry in word and work;
by your mighty acts of power;
and by your preaching of the kingdom,

All good Lord, deliver us.

By your agony and trial;
by your cross and passion;
and by your precious death and burial,

All good Lord, deliver us.

By your mighty resurrection;
by your glorious ascension;
and by your sending of the Holy Spirit,

All good Lord, deliver us.

Give us true repentance;
forgive us our sins of negligence and ignorance
and our deliberate sins;
and grant us the grace of your Holy Spirit
to amend our lives according to your holy word.

**All Holy God,
holy and strong,
holy and immortal,
have mercy upon us.**

Silence

Make our hearts clean, O God;

All and renew a right spirit within us.

All **Father eternal, giver of light and grace,
we have sinned against you and against our neighbour,
in what we have thought,
in what we have said and done,
through ignorance, through weakness,
through our own deliberate fault.
We have wounded your love,
and marred your image in us.
We are sorry and ashamed,
and repent of all our sins.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
who died for us,
forgive us all that is past;
and lead us out from darkness
to walk as children of light.
Amen.**

The Imposition of Ashes

Dear friends in Christ,
I invite you to receive these ashes
as a sign of the spirit of penitence with which we shall keep this season of Lent.

God our Father,
you create us from the dust of the earth:
grant that these ashes may be for us
a sign of our penitence
and a symbol of our mortality;
for it is by your grace alone
that we receive eternal life
in Jesus Christ our Saviour.

All **Amen.**

The shape of the cross is drawn on the foreheads of those who wish with ash. At the imposition the minister says to each person

Remember that you are dust,
and to dust you shall return.
Turn away from sin and be faithful to Christ.

We maintain silence during the imposition.

God our Father,
the strength of all who put their trust in you,
mercifully accept our prayers;
and because, in our weakness,
we can do nothing good without you,
grant us the help of your grace,
that in keeping your commandments
we may please you, both in will and deed;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

Absolution

The Lord enrich you with his grace,
and nourish you with his blessing;
the Lord defend you in trouble and keep you from all evil;
the Lord accept your prayers,
and absolve you from your offences,
for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Saviour.

All Amen.

Prayers of intercession

With confidence and trust let us pray to the Father.
For the one holy catholic and apostolic Church ...
let us pray to the Father.
Lord of compassion,

All in your mercy hear us.

For the mission of the Church,
that in faithful witness it may preach the Gospel
to the ends of the earth,
let us pray to the Father.
Lord of compassion,

All in your mercy hear us.

For those preparing for baptism ...
and for their teachers and sponsors,
let us pray to the Father.
Lord of compassion,

All in your mercy hear us.

For peace in the world ...
that a spirit of respect and reconciliation may grow
among nations and peoples,
let us pray to the Father.

Lord of compassion,

All in your mercy hear us.

For the poor, the persecuted, the sick, and all who suffer ...
for refugees, prisoners, and all in danger;
that they may be relieved and protected,
let us pray to the Father.

Lord of compassion,

All in your mercy hear us.

For those whom we have injured or offended,
let us pray to the Father.

Lord of compassion,

All in your mercy hear us.

For grace to amend our lives and to further the reign of God,
let us pray to the Father.

Lord of compassion,

All in your mercy hear us.

In communion with all those who have walked in the way of holiness ...
let us pray to the Father.

Lord of compassion,

All in your mercy hear us.

God our Father,
in your love and goodness
you have taught us to come close to you in penitence
with prayer, fasting and generosity;
accept our Lenten discipline,
and when we fall by our weakness,
raise us up by your unfailing mercy;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

Merciful Father,

All accept these prayers

**for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.**

The peace

Since we are justified by faith,
we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,
who has given us access to his grace.

The peace of the Lord be always with you,

All And also with you.

HYMN 3 I will wait for your peace (please click on this link to hear the hymn)

The Liturgy of the Sacrament

Eucharistic Prayer (prayer E)

The Lord be with you

All and also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

All We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

All It is right to give thanks and praise.

It is indeed right and good
to give you thanks and praise,
almighty God and everlasting Father,
through Jesus Christ your Son.

For in these forty days
you lead us into the desert of repentance
that through a pilgrimage of prayer and discipline
we may grow in grace
and learn to be your people once again.

Through fasting, prayer and acts of service
you bring us back to your generous heart.

Through study of your holy word
you open our eyes to your presence in the world
and free our hands to welcome others
into the radiant splendour of your love.

As we prepare to celebrate the Easter feast
with joyful hearts and minds
we bless you for your mercy
and join with saints and angels
for ever praising you and saying:

**All Holy, holy, holy Lord,
 God of power and might,
 heaven and earth are full of your glory.
 Hosanna in the highest.
 Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
 Hosanna in the highest.**

We praise and bless you, loving Father,
through Jesus Christ, our Lord;
and as we obey his command,
send your Holy Spirit,
that broken bread and wine outpoured
may be for us the body and blood of your dear Son.

On the night before he died he had supper with his friends
and, taking bread, he praised you.
He broke the bread, gave it to them and said:
Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you;
do this in remembrance of me.

When supper was ended he took the cup of wine.
Again he praised you, gave it to them and said:
Drink this, all of you;
this is my blood of the new covenant,
which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

So, Father, we remember all that Jesus did,
in him we plead with confidence his sacrifice made once for all upon the cross.

Bringing before you the bread of life and cup of salvation,
we proclaim his death and resurrection
until he comes in glory.

Great is the mystery of faith:

**All Christ has died.
Christ is risen.
Christ will come again.**

Lord of all life,
help us to work together for that day
when your kingdom comes
and justice and mercy will be seen in all the earth.

Look with favour on your people,
gather us in your loving arms
and bring us with all the saints
to feast at your table in heaven.

Through Christ, and with Christ, and in Christ,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all honour and glory are yours, O loving Father,
for ever and ever.

All Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

**All 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.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.**

Breaking of the Bread

We break this bread to share in the body of Christ.

All **Though we are many, we are one body,
because we all share in one bread.**

All **Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
grant us peace.**

Draw near with faith.

Receive the body of our Lord Jesus Christ

which he gave for you,

and his blood which he shed for you.

Eat and drink in remembrance that he died for you,

and feed on him in your hearts

by faith with thanksgiving.

All **We do not presume
to come to this your table, merciful Lord,
trusting in our own righteousness,
but in your manifold and great mercies.
We are not worthy
so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table.
But you are the same Lord
whose nature is always to have mercy.
Grant us therefore, gracious Lord,
so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ
and to drink his blood,
that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body
and our souls washed through his most precious blood,
and that we may evermore dwell in him,
and he in us.
Amen.**

Communion is distributed.

Prayer after Communion

Almighty God,
you have given your only Son to be for us
both a sacrifice for sin
and also an example of godly life:
give us grace
that we may always most thankfully receive
these his inestimable gifts,
and also daily endeavour
to follow the blessed steps of his most holy life;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All **Amen**

All **Almighty God,**
we thank you for feeding us
with the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ.
Through him we offer you our souls and bodies
to be a living sacrifice.
Send us out in the power of your Spirit
to live and work
to your praise and glory.
Amen.

The Dismissal

This is love, not that we loved God,

All **but that he loved us and sent his Son.**

He is the sacrifice for our sins,

All **that we might live through him.**

If God loves us so much

All **we ought to love one another.**

If we love one another

All **God lives in us.** *cf. 1 John 4:12*

The Dismissal Gospel

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Luke.

All **Glory to you, O Lord.**

Jesus said, 'Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbours, saying to them, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost." Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who need no repentance.' *Luke 15:4-7*

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

All **Praise to you, O Christ.**

Christ give you grace to grow in holiness,
to deny yourselves, take up your cross, and follow him;
and the blessing
and the blessing of God the Almighty:
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
be with you now and remain with you always.

All **Amen.**

HYMN 4 **Nunc dimittis**

(please click on this link to hear the hymn)

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

All **In the name of Christ.**

Amen.