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## Ash Wednesday - 22 February 2023

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# 22 February 2023

## Ash Wednesday

Reflection by Peter Black

### Introduction

The Ash Wednesday readings encourage Christians to journey the season of Lent with activities long understood to draw people closer to God. We hear of a God who responds graciously to our honest efforts to turn toward the Lord.

### Penitential Act

Use one of the *Roman Missal* texts or this optional litany form:

Lord Jesus, you came to heal all sinners. Lord have mercy.

You teach us to pray. Christ have mercy.

You call us to repentance. Lord have mercy.

### Collect

*The Oration*

Grant, O Lord, that we may begin with holy fasting  
this campaign of Christian service,  
so that, as we take up battle against spiritual evils,  
we may be armed with weapons of self-restraint.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
God, for ever and ever.

The opening collect sets a battle tone for first sally into the Lenten discipline. The emphasis falls to fasting and self-restraint, as befitting the beginning of the fast. The tenor is one of engagement, and the season styled after a military campaign. The faithful take up arms and engage in the conflict. The weapons of fasting and self-restraint are 'holy', pertaining to the things of God. They are to be used to counter 'spiritual' evils. The oration, then, is very much a call to action, arresting the attention and reminding that there is no turning back. Interestingly the more militant imagery quickly falls away as the Lent progresses, introducing richer themes of joy, nourishment and insight. The Ash Wednesday liturgy, however, is a first call to active resistance in the face of evil through fasting and self-restraint.

## **Acknowledgement**

The discussion of the collect, slightly adapted, was composed by Gerard Moore for the Canadian liturgical journal *Celebrate!* (Novalis Press). Our thanks to them for permission to reuse the material.

## **First Reading**

### **Joel 2:12-18**

The prophet Joel calls all the people of God to recognise their need for the Lord and to do so with all their hearts.

## **Responsorial Psalm**

### **Psalm 50(51):3-6, 12-14, 17**

*Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.*

God's mercy and compassion are never in question in this psalm which is attributed to David. God can create in us a clean heart and put within us a new and right spirit.

## **Second Reading**

### **2 Corinthians 5:20-6:2**

We hear Paul call believers not to neglect the grace of God which is available to us now, a grace that allows us to encounter and live the 'goodness of God'.

## **Gospel Reading**

### **Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18**

Jesus reminds us that the attitude we have in engaging in spiritual activities such as giving alms, prayer and fasting matters more than simply what they look like.

## **Reflection**

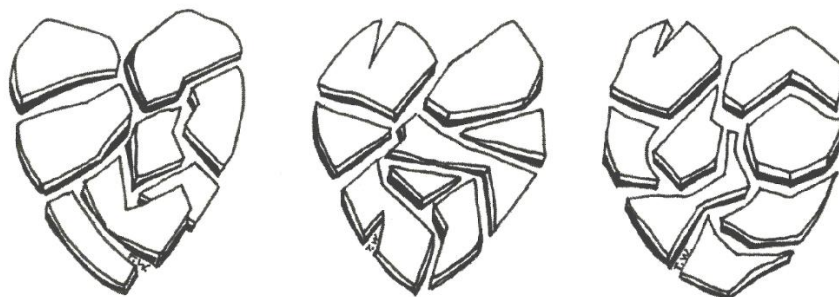
Recently while reading a book on Celtic spirituality (*Anam Cara: Spiritual Wisdom From the Celtic World*, by John O'Donohue) I came across the word 'smoothing' for the first time. Apparently, years ago, at the end of the day in a humble home in Ireland, ashes would be 'smoored' over the burning coals in the hearth so that in the chilly morning these coals could be uncovered and fanned into a new flame for the day ahead. The image is an evocative one for Ash Wednesday, the beginning of the Lenten season. A time to take stock of the unseen coals hidden under the ashes during the night so that new life can spark on Easter morning. The austere rite, the imposition of ashes, is so simple and yet so powerful.

When you receive these ashes on Ash Wednesday think of the fire of faith waiting to be re-ignited and how these embers can be stirred by prayer, self-sacrifice and love

of neighbour over the next forty days. Why forty days? The period of Lent corresponds to Christ's prayer and fasting for forty days in the wilderness before his public ministry. There are also roots in the Old Testament, when the people of Israel travelled through the desert for 40 years on their way to the Promised Land. We are reminded that it takes time and perseverance to remember, to reflect, to change, and to move forward. Prayer, acts of self-sacrifice and extra attempts to show love to others are the daily reminders to renew ourselves during these forty days. These traditional practices during Lent are a proven way to clear the ashes so that we can experience once again the fire of faith burning within us. What ashes do we need to brush away this Lent? Do certain harmful ways of thinking and acting, built up over the year, need to be brushed aside?

Remember how the creation story describes our coming to being from the dust of the ground. 'The Lord God fashioned man of dust of the earth.' We remember not only our beginning but also our end. On the first day of Lent, ashes can be imposed with the words: 'Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.' These words are a reality check so that our priorities are rightly ordered in our daily living.

We reflect today on the invitation to repentance and change at a deep level, not a superficial one. We listen to that powerful appeal which the prophet Joel addresses to the people of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning' (2.12). The phrase 'with all your heart,' means a change, a renewal, from the very core of our thoughts and feelings, from the roots of our intentions, decisions, choices and actions. 'Rend your hearts and not your garments' (v. 13). Jesus, in the gospel of Matthew, reminds us that such change is not for show or approval, but rather interior so that it can help make the Kingdom of God come alive in our life. In a climate that continually seeks attention, praise and approval from others the season of Lent reminds us that there is a deeper level to our existence. We need to be at peace within ourselves and with our God who sees who we truly are. We have the alternative words that can be used with the imposition of ashes: 'Repent and believe in the gospel.' The gospel is the heart of the fire of life and repentance will turn the ashes out so that the warmth of the grace of the Holy Spirit will radiate from the fire enkindled within us.



*Be merciful, O God, for we have sinned.*

# Prayer of the Faithful

## Introduction

The prophet Joel calls us to come back to God with all our hearts. And so with hearts full of trust we offer our needs to the Father.

## Petitions

We pray for the Church, that the observance of Lent will strengthen us all to live in the truth of the Gospel and walk humbly towards the Synod.

*(Pause)* Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for the leaders of our Church in Australia, that they will be open in implementing the Plenary Council with hearts led by the Holy Spirit.

*(Pause)* Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for the leaders of our nation and leaders of the world. May they realise that generosity to the poor through distribution of wealth is necessary for the sake of justice and peace and that compassion must be valued.

*(Pause)* Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for all those who suffer due to the damage done by members of the Church. May this time of Lent ease their grief and pain as the Church seeks to heal and safeguard all those in her care.

*(Pause)* Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for all of us gathered to receive the ashes. May it remind us that we must live the Gospel in our frailty and humility and cultivate a mindfulness of God and of others.

*(Pause)* Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

## Conclusion

Father, in this Lenten journey we trust that you hear and answer our needs. We make our prayer through the power of the Spirit and in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ.

**Amen.**

## Music selections by Alessio Loiacono and Chris deSilva

Ash Wednesday, Year A (22 February 2023)

Title	AOV1	AOV2	AOVK	CWB	CWBII	GA
A new heart for a new world	158				477	438
Again we keep this solemn fast					285	
Ashes		16				209
Be reconciled as one	162					
Bring us back to you, O Lord our God				629	287	
Create in me a clean heart, O God					478	40
Forgive our sins as we forgive				680	120	
Forty days and forty nights					288	
From ashes to the living font					289	
God of mercy and compassion				692	290	302
Grant to us, O Lord				698	291	303
Hear us, almighty Lord ( <i>Attende Domine</i> )					292	
Hosea ( <i>Come back to me</i> )	30			715		213
Lord Jesus, as we turn from sin				735	294	
May this Lenten discipline				746	295	
O Father, I know I can count on your mercy				762	122	
Our Father, we have wandered				784	297	
Return to God					298	304
The glory of these forty days				825	301	
We want to live like you, Jesus			32			

Title	AOVNG	S&S1	S&S2
Be merciful, O Lord (Angrisano)		66	
Be merciful, O Lord (Thomas)			257
Create a clean heart			302
Tree of life	138		

## Psalms Selected by Chris deSilva and Angela McCarthy

Psalm 50: *Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.*

	CWB	GA	JOBA	LPSF	PM
Psalm 50	202	41	pg. 28	pg. 20	pg. 41

## Music selections by Michael Mangan

**Out of ashes** (TT/SYJ) [Gathering, Distribution of Ashes]

**Create a new heart** (FWS) *Based on Ps 50/51* [Gathering, Distribution of Ashes, Gifts, Recessional]

**Be merciful O Lord** (LCC) *Ps 50/51* [Children's Lectionary]

**This is the time** (TT) [Gathering, Recessional]

**Lenten acclamation** (TT) [Gospel Acclamation]

**Lenten Gospel acclamation – Mass Jubilee** (MJC) [Gospel Acclamation]

**Turn back to God** (TT/SYJ) [CHILDREN: Gathering, Recessional]