

# A LITURGY FOR ASH WEDNESDAY (THE FIRST DAY OF LENT)

## LITURGICAL NOTES AND SUGGESTIONS

### **The Season of Lent**

Lent is a time of preparation for Easter: forty days of preparation for fifty days of celebration. Lent means waiting: for the cross, the water and the fire. God does not need Lent, but we do. The rhythm of fast and feast taps into some elemental need of ours, where denial creates longings to be satisfied so that we come to deeper appreciation of God's great gifts.

Lent is a time for preparing catechumens (baptismal candidates) for Easter baptism. It has its origins in the fact that preparation of catechumens is a process by which the whole Christian community is renewed. While Sunday is always a festival of the crucified and raised Christ, omission of the *Gloria (Glory to God)*, along with addition of the *Trisagion (Holy God, holy and mighty ...)* and other Lenten material provided in *A Prayer Book for Australia* will help set the tone for the Season.

The six Sundays of the season are seen as a unity. The usual liturgical colours for the first five Sundays are violet or Lenten array (blood red, black and calico). The only Sunday with any significant difference is Lent VI - the Sunday of the Passion (Palm Sunday) when the colour changes to red (but preferably without the Pentecost symbols), and it can be appropriate for red to remain through to Good Friday.

### **Setting the scene**

Early planning is needed. A distinct break in the setting and mood of the liturgy needs to be made from Christmas and the Sundays after Epiphany to Lent. The intention is to create a more intense focus on the principal symbols of God's presence with us. These are: the assembly of Christ's people; the lectern; the Lord's Table; the empty font. This can happen in different ways: by removing clutter, by covering up decorative art etc., by changes in lighting, by the removal of flowers. Different buildings and different communities will demand different treatment. A good rule of thumb might be to remove everything that is not directly needed. The font can be emptied and covered. Covering crosses in Holy Week is a tradition sometimes observed. However, even if several crosses are visible in a church, Lent is a good time to remove them all and bring back only one (uncovered) for Passion Sunday and Holy Week.

### **Pancakes and ashes**

Shrove Tuesday events go hand in hand with Ash Wednesday: feasting before fasting. One without the other leaves something missing. If it is difficult to have two midweek events, perhaps some of the feasting can be transferred to the Last Sunday after Epiphany, with the traditional pancake party held at breakfast or morning tea. On the same day everyone may be invited to bring last year's palm crosses or fronds to be burnt to make the ashes for Ash Wednesday.

How shall we begin Lent? There is work to do well before Ash Wednesday, and these preparations can involve the whole community. Ash Wednesday is the focus: Shrove Tuesday 'events' need to supplement the more important First Day of Lent.

On the Last Sunday after Epiphany it is possible to do two helpful things: the first in church, the second extending the Lord's table to the breakfast or morning tea table. Everyone may be asked to bring back last year's palm crosses or fronds and to burn them to make the ashes for Ash Wednesday. This represents a little death, a letting go of the past in order to embrace God's future. The burning of the palms is best done in silence.

## **To Baptise or not to Baptise?**

Easter baptism is resuming its central place in the sacramental life of the Church. Baptisms during Lent actually undermine the character of the season.

# A LITURGY FOR ASH WEDNESDAY

## GATHERING IN GOD'S NAME

*An Invocation, or an Acclamation such as follows, may be said before or after the greeting.*

Blessed be the Lord who forgives all our sins,  
**whose mercy endures for ever.**

*The priest greets the congregation*

The Lord be with you.  
**And also with you.**

*The following Sentence may be used*

As far as the east is from the west, so far has God set our sins from us.

|                           |                        |
|---------------------------|------------------------|
| <b>Lord, have mercy</b>   | <b>Kyrie eleison</b>   |
| <b>Christ, have mercy</b> | <b>Christe eleison</b> |
| <b>Lord, have mercy</b>   | <b>Kyrie eleison</b>   |

*and/or*

**Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal,  
have mercy on us.**

*The priest says*

Let us pray.

*Silence*

Almighty and everlasting God,  
you hate nothing that you have made,  
and you 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 brokenness,  
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, now and for ever. **Amen.**

*or the Prayer of the day (APBA page 481)*

## THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

*One or two lessons and the Gospel Reading are read.*

*Joel 2.1-2,12-17 or Isaiah 58.1-12*

*Ps 51.1-17 (or Ps 90.1-12, if Ps 51 is to be used at the Ashing)*

*2 Corinthians 5.20b - 6.10*

*Matthew 6.1-6 (7-15)16-21*

*The Sermon*

## THE ACT OF PENITENCE

*The priest says these or similar words*

Sisters and brothers in Christ, from the earliest days of  
the Church, Christians have observed with great devotion

the time of our Lord's passion and resurrection. It became the custom of the church to prepare for this by a season of penitence and fasting.

At first this season was observed by those who were preparing for baptism at Easter and by those who, having been excommunicated, were to be restored to the communion of the church. By keeping these days with care and attention Christians might take to heart the call to repentance and the assurance of forgiveness proclaimed in the gospel, and grow in faith and devotion to our Lord.

So, by self-examination and repentance, by prayer and fasting, by self-denial and acts of generosity and by reading and meditating on the word of God, let us keep a holy Lent

*Silence is kept.*

*Ps 51.1-17 may be said or sung.*

#### THE RECEIVING OF ASHES

*The ashes are placed on the Lord's Table, and the priest says*

Blessed are you, God of all creation.  
You are eternal,  
we are mortal,  
formed from the dust of the earth.  
As we receive these ashes, make them a sign for us  
of repentance and returning to you.  
Breathe into us again the breath of life.  
**Blessed be God for ever.**

Come, receive the sign of ashes.

*The ashes are placed on each person's forehead in silence, or with the words*

Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return.

*and/or*

Repent and believe the gospel.

*and/or*

Turn away from sin and be faithful to Christ.

*Each person may answer **Amen***

#### LITANY

Eternal God, maker of heaven and earth,  
**have mercy on us.**

Incarnate Word, redeemer of the world,  
**have mercy on us.**

Abiding Spirit, giver of light and life,  
**have mercy on us.**

For turning away from your presence,  
for disobeying your word and commandments,  
**forgive us, Lord.**

For trusting in our own strength instead of yours,  
for betraying your trust and the trust of others,  
**forgive us, Lord.**

For resisting your grace and refusing your blessings,  
for holding back from proclaiming our faith in you,  
**forgive us, Lord.**

For damaging this earth and exploiting its creatures,  
for neglecting and wasting the gifts you have given us,  
**forgive us, Lord.**

For failing to forgive as we have been forgiven.  
for judging others and bearing grudges,  
**forgive us, Lord.**

For skimping on our commitments and relationships,  
for failing in hospitality,  
**forgive us, Lord.**

For tolerating oppression, injustice, and wrong,  
for keeping silent when we should have spoken up,  
**forgive us, Lord.**

For turning away when others have offered us love,  
for closing our hearts when others have needed compassion,  
**forgive us, Lord.**

For all we have done unkindly, unjustly and dishonestly,  
for our careless speech and hurtful words,  
**forgive us, Lord.**

Most merciful God,  
**we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed,  
and in what we have failed to do:  
we have not loved you with our whole heart;  
we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves;  
we repent, and are sorry for all our sins.  
Father, forgive us.  
Strengthen us to love and obey you in newness of life;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

*The priest pronounces the absolution*

With our hearts turned to God in repentance,  
with the knowledge of our sins  
laid bare before the cross of Jesus Christ,  
in the name of the living God,  
your sins are forgiven.  
Receive God's mercy,  
take hold of your forgiveness,  
and, in the power of the Holy Spirit,  
walk in the light of Christ. **Amen.**

## THE GREETING OF PEACE

*All stand. The Greeting is introduced with these or other appropriate words*

Christ has reconciled us to God in one body by the cross.

**We meet in his name and share his peace.**

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

**And also with you.**

*All may exchange a greeting of peace.*

*A hymn may be sung.*

*(If there is no Eucharist, then the service may end here with the Lord's Prayer and the saying of the Grace.)*

## PREPARATION OF THE LORD'S TABLE

*The gifts of bread and wine are placed on the table. They may be presented in silence, or with the accustomed prayer.*

## THE GREAT THANKSGIVING

*Any authorized Thanksgiving may be used.*

*Note the proper for Lent on APBA p 151.*

*It is suggested that Thanksgiving 2 on APBA page 130 not be used, nor any other Thanksgiving with a festive tone.*

## THE SENDING OUT OF GOD'S PEOPLE

*See the Prayer after Communion APBA page 151.*

*For the Blessing see APBA page 152. Note that it is not necessary to pronounce the Blessing as such.*

*The second option on APBA page 152 allows for a Prayer over the People, saving the festive Blessing until Easter.*

*In place of the above the following may be used.*

*The priest says this blessing prayer*

God of life and death,  
from the fullness of yourself  
you have created all that is;  
through the power of your love  
you call us towards you;  
in the giving of your Son  
our salvation has been wrought.  
Our flowering and our passing,  
all the seasons of the vine,  
belong to you.

Bless us now and in all our days,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

*The deacon says*

Go in the peace of Christ.

**Thanks be to God.**

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