

ASH WEDNESDAY

A CALL TO RETURN

Through the words of the prophet Joel, God called to His people and commanded that they turn from their sinful ways and return to Him for His grace and blessings. The images the prophet uses are vivid and disturbing. The situation of God's people is desperate and needs immediate attention. This is a time for listening and responding to the call to return to faithfulness to the God who has ever been faithful to His people. "Return to the Lord, your God" is more than a verse sung as part of the liturgy. It is a heartfelt directive for our lives as together we follow the pathway of Lent.

+ PREPARATION +

OPENING HYMN: *To Thee, Omniscient Lord of All*

P Dear brothers and sisters of our Lord Jesus Christ, on this day the Church begins a holy season of prayerful and penitential reflection. Our attention is especially directed to the holy sufferings and death of our Lord Jesus Christ.

From ancient times the season of Lent has been kept as a time of special devotion, self-denial, and humble repentance born of a faithful heart that dwells confidently on His Word and draws from it life and hope.

The Bible contains a number of references to ashes and dust (cf. Josh. 7:6; 1 Sam. 4:12; 2 Sam. 1:2, 15:32; Job 2:12, 16:15; Jer. 25:34; Lam. 2:10; Ezek. 27:30; Jonah 3:6). In fact, the Lord's curse on Adam after the fall into sin was, "dust you are, and to dust you shall return" (Gen. 3:19). In the New Testament, Jesus declares: "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes" (Matt. 11:21). Thus, in the Bible, ashes carry a two-fold meaning: as a sign of human mortality (Gen. 3:19) and as a sign of public repentance (Matt. 11:21).

Let us pray that our dear Father in heaven, for the sake of His beloved Son and in the power of His Holy Spirit, might richly bless this Lententide for us so that we may come to Easter with glad hearts and keep the feast in sincerity and truth.

P O God, You desire not the death of sinners, but rather that they turn from their wickedness and live. We implore You to have compassion on the frailty of our mortal nature, for we acknowledge that we are dust and to dust we shall return. Mercifully pardon our sins that we may obtain the promises You have laid up for those who are repentant; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C **Amen.**

Silence for reflection

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

P Almighty God, we beseech You to grant us true repentance and Your Holy Spirit, that the rest of our lives may be pure and holy, and that at the last we may come to Your eternal joy; through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

C **Amen.**

INVOCATION

P In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C **Amen.**

OPENING SENTENCES *Psalm 25:1–5*

P To You, O LORD, I lift up my soul.

C **O my God, in You I trust;**

P let me not be put to shame;

C **let not my enemies exult over me.**

P Indeed, none who wait for You shall be put to shame;

C **they shall be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.**

P Make me to know Your ways, O LORD;

C **teach me Your paths.**

P Lead me in Your truth and teach me,

C **for You are the God of my salvation;
for You I wait all the day long.**

CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

P Let us now confess our sins to our heavenly Father, imploring Him for the sake of His Son, Jesus Christ, to grant us forgiveness.

P O almighty God, merciful Father,

C **I, a poor, miserable sinner, confess to You all my sins in thought, word, and deed with which I have offended You. By nature, I am sinful and unclean. Time and again I have not responded to Your call to return to You and to walk in Your ways. Although I justly deserve Your punishment in time and for eternity, I am truly sorry for my transgressions and sincerely repent of them. In Your boundless mercy and for the sake of the holy, innocent, bitter sufferings and death of Your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, be gracious and merciful to me, forgive me all my sins, and by the working of the Holy Spirit direct me to walk in Your loving ways.**

P God be merciful to you and strengthen your faith.

C **Amen.**

P Do you believe that the forgiveness I speak is not my forgiveness but God's?

C **Yes.**

P Let it be done for you as you believe.

P In the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C **Amen.**

P Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; He will surely do it. Go in + peace.

C **Amen.**

SALUTATION and PRAYER OF THE DAY

P The Lord be with you.

C **And also with you.**

P Let us pray.

O Lord, You bid Your people return to You in repentance and have promised forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. Grant that, forgiven and free, we may live each day in joyful hope as Your beloved children; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C **Amen.**

+ SERVICE OF THE WORD +

OLD TESTAMENT READING *Joel 2:12–19, 28-32*

P The Old Testament Reading for Ash Wednesday is from Joel, the second chapter.

¹²“Yet even now,” declares the LORD,
“return to me with all your heart,
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;
¹³and rend your hearts and not your garments.”

Return to the LORD, your God,
for he is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love;
and he relents over disaster.

¹⁴Who knows whether he will not turn and relent,
and leave a blessing behind him,
a grain offering and a drink offering
for the LORD your God?

¹⁵Blow the trumpet in Zion;
consecrate a fast;
call a solemn assembly;

¹⁶gather the people.
Consecrate the congregation;
assemble the elders;
gather the children,
even nursing infants.

Let the bridegroom leave his room,
and the bride her chamber.

¹⁷Between the vestibule and the altar
let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep
and say, "Spare your people, O LORD,
and make not your heritage a reproach,
a byword among the nations.

Why should they say among the peoples,
'Where is their God?'"

¹⁸Then the LORD became jealous for his land
and had pity on his people.

¹⁹The LORD answered and said to his people,
"Behold, I am sending to you
grain, wine, and oil,
and you will be satisfied;
and I will no more make you
a reproach among the nations.

²⁸ "And it shall come to pass afterward,
that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh;
your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
your old men shall dream dreams,
and your young men shall see visions.

²⁹Even on the male and female servants
in those days I will pour out my Spirit.

³⁰"And I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of
smoke. ³¹The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and
awesome day of the LORD comes. ³²And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the
name of the LORD shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who
escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls.

P This is the Word of the Lord.

C **Thanks be to God.**

PSALM (*spoken responsively by verse*) *Psalm 51:1–13*

¹Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy

blot out my transgressions.
**²Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin!**

³For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.
**⁴Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you may be justified in your words
and blameless in your judgment.**

⁵Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
and in sin did my mother conceive me.
**⁶Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being,
and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.**

⁷Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
**⁸Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones that you have broken rejoice.**

⁹Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.
**¹⁰Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.**

¹¹Cast me not away from your presence,
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.
**¹²Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and uphold me with a willing spirit.**

¹³Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will return to you.

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning,
is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

EPISTLE *2 Corinthians 5:20b–6:10*

P The Epistle is from Second Corinthians, the fifth and sixth chapters.

^{20b} We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.

¹ Working together with Him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. ² For He says,

“In a favorable time I listened to you,
and in a day of salvation I have helped you.”

Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation. ³ We put no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, ⁴ but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, ⁵ beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; ⁶ by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; ⁷ by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; ⁸ through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; ⁹ as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; ¹⁰ as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything.

P This is the Word of the Lord.

C **Thanks be to God.**

VERSE *Joel 2:13b*

Return to the LORD, your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.

HOLY GOSPEL *Matthew 6:1–6, 16–21*

P The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, the sixth chapter.

C **Glory to You, O Lord.**

¹ [Jesus said:] “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.

² “Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ³ But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

⁵ “And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. . . .

¹⁶ “And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ¹⁷ But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

¹⁹ “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

P This is the Gospel of the Lord.

C Praise to You, O Christ.

HYMN OF THE DAY: *From Depths of Woe I Cry to Thee*

- 1 From depths of woe I cry to Thee,
In trial and tribulation;
Bend down Thy gracious ear to me,
Lord, hear my supplication.
If Thou rememb'rest ev'ry sin,
Who then could heaven ever win
Or stand before Thy presence?

- 2 Thy love and grace alone avail
To blot out my transgression;
The best and holiest deeds must fail
To break sin's dread oppression.
Before Thee none can boasting stand,
But all must fear Thy strict demand
And live alone by mercy.

- 3 Therefore my hope is in the Lord
And not in mine own merit;
It rests upon His faithful Word
To them of contrite spirit
That He is merciful and just;
This is my comfort and my trust.
His help I wait with patience.

- 4 And though it tarry through the night
And till the morning waken,
My heart shall never doubt His might
Nor count itself forsaken.
O Israel, trust in God your Lord.
Born of the Spirit and the Word,
Now wait for His appearing.

- 5 Though great our sins, yet greater still
Is God's abundant favor;
His hand of mercy never will
Abandon us, nor waver.
Our shepherd good and true is He,
Who will at last His Israel free
From all their sin and sorrow.

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SERMON

APOSTLES' CREED

**C I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth.**

**And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.
He descended into hell.
The third day He rose again from the dead.
He ascended into heaven
and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.
From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy Christian Church,
the communion of saints.
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

After each petition :

P let us pray to the Lord

C Lord, have mercy.

The prayers conclude:

P ... Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, in whose name we pray.

C Amen.

OFFERING

LORD'S PRAYER

**C Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be 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.
For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.**

CLOSING COLLECT

P Gracious and merciful God, You call Your people to return, and You forgive the sins of all who come to You with penitent and contrite hearts. Grant us the spirit of true repentance to acknowledge our sins and to find in You forgiveness and restoration, wholeness and peace; through the merits of Jesus Christ, our Lord and our Redeemer.

C **Amen.**

BENEDICTION

P The Lord bless you and keep you.
The Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you.
The Lord look upon you with favor and + give you peace.

C **Amen.**

HYMN: *O Lord, throughout These Forty Days*

Acknowledgments

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