

Step-by-Step Guide to Celebrate a Liturgy of the Word at Home for Ash Wednesday



The following guide was created to encourage families and individuals to mark the start of Lent in a special way. Even though Ash Wednesday is not considered a day of obligation in Canada, there is a rich tradition and desire to attend Mass to receive ashes.

In normal circumstances, the blessing and distribution of ashes would take place during a public Mass. However, it is possible to distribute ashes outside of Mass, during a celebration of the Word of God.

The following guide was inspired from the order used when bringing ashes to the sick found in The Book of Blessings prepared by the International Commission on English in the

Liturgy (ICEL) 1989. It can be shortened if need be, as long that at least one Scripture reading is included.

The blessing of ashes is reserved for a priest or deacon. If you are not able to receive blessed ashes from your parish, you can burn blessed palms to have ashes on hand.

Before – In Preparation

Find the readings of the day.

- 1) The daily readings can be found on the [Universalis website](#). They are also included in this guide.
- 2) You can print a copy or even find the readings in a Bible. It would be helpful to indicate in the Bible where the different readings start and end.

Review this guide and plan anything else that may need to be prepared.

- 3) Reflection after the readings, intercessory prayers, songs.
- 4) You may want to prepare the space where you will have the Liturgy of the Word by lighting a candle, adding a purple cloth, having a crucifix set up on a table.

Assign the different roles for the celebration.

- 5) Leader for the celebration, readers, who will offer a reflection, leader of song.

Have ashes ready.

- 6) You can contact your parish to see if they will have blessed ashes available for pick up. You may also burn your blessed palms from the last Palm Sunday.

Introductory Rites

Entrance Song

- A suitable opening song may be sung. All stand.

Greeting

- All stand as the leader says: **In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. (+)**
- All make the sign of the Cross and respond: *Amen*
- The leader greets those present: **Praised be the God of grace, mercy, and peace. Blessed be God for ever.**
- All respond: *Blessed be God for ever.*

Introduction

- The leader introduces the celebration in these or similar words:
My brothers and sisters, the hour of God's favor draws near, the day of his mercy and of our salvation approaches, when death was destroyed and eternal life began. As we begin this season of Lent, we gather today to acknowledge that we are sinners. As we express our sorrow, may God be merciful to us and restore us to his friendship.

Opening Prayer

- The leader then says the opening prayer.
Let us pray. (A brief period of silence, the leader continues.)
Father in heaven, the light of your truth bestows sight to the darkness of sinful eyes. May this season of repentance bring us the blessing of your forgiveness and the gift of your light. Grant this through Christ our Lord.

Liturgy of the Word

- All are seated. A brief silence is observed after each reading. Any family member can proclaim the reading.

First Reading Joel 2.12-18

Even now, says the LORD, return to me with your whole heart, with fasting, and weeping, and mourning; Rend your hearts, not your garments, and return to the LORD, your God. For gracious and merciful is he, slow to anger, rich in kindness, and relenting in punishment. Perhaps he will again relent and leave behind him a blessing, Offerings and libations for the LORD, your God. Blow the trumpet in Zion! proclaim a fast, call an assembly; Gather the people, notify the congregation; Assemble the elders, gather the children and the infants at the breast; Let the bridegroom quit his room and the bride her chamber. Between the porch and the altar let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep, And say, "Spare, O LORD, your people, and make not your heritage a reproach, with the nations ruling over them! Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where is their God?'" Then the LORD was stirred to concern for his land and took pity on his people.

The Word of the Lord.

All respond: *Thanks be to God.*

Psalms 51:3-4, 5-6AB, 12-13, 14 AND 17

R. (see 3a) Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.

Have mercy on me, O God, in your goodness;
in the greatness of your compassion wipe out my offense.
Thoroughly wash me from my guilt
and of my sin cleanse me.

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

For I acknowledge my offense,
and my sin is before me always:
“Against you only have I sinned,
and done what is evil in your sight.”

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

A clean heart create for me, O God,
and a steadfast spirit renew within me.
Cast me not out from your presence,
and your Holy Spirit take not from me.

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

Give me back the joy of your salvation,
and a willing spirit sustain in me.
O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth shall proclaim your praise.

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

Second Reading 2 Corinthians 5.20-6.2

Brothers and sisters: We are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who did not know sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

Working together, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For he says: In an acceptable time I heard you, and on the day of salvation I helped you. Behold, now is a very acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

The Word of the Lord.
All respond: *Thanks be to God.*

Gospel Acclamation Psalm 95:8

- All stand.

If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

Gospel: Matthew 6.1-6, 16-18 The leader should proclaim the Gospel

A Reading from the Gospel according to St. Matthew.

All Respond: *Glory to You, Lord.*

Jesus said to his disciples:

“Take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them; otherwise, you will have no recompense from your heavenly Father. When you give alms, do not blow a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets to win the praise of others. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing, so that your almsgiving may be secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you.

“When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners so that others may see them. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you.

“When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites. They neglect their appearance, so that they may appear to others to be fasting. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to be fasting, except to your Father who is hidden. And your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

All respond: *Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.*

Reflection period

- The leader can give a brief reflection of the readings to the family or the family can briefly discuss what the texts of the readings meant to them.

Distribution of the Ashes

- Here is a prayer to be recited by the leader before the ashes are laid.

Lord our God, you who want our conversion, in your goodness, hear our prayer; through the ashes with which we will be marked as a sign of our commitment to change our hearts and believe in the Good News. We ask this of you who live and reign forever and ever.

All respond: *Amen.*

- Ashes are distributed on those who come forward, saying ONE of formulas below.

Turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel.

OR

Remember, you are dust and to dust you will return.

Intercessions

- All stand.
- The leader introduces them and an assisting minister or one of those present announces the intentions. The following may be used or adapted, or other intentions that apply to the particular circumstances may be composed.
- The leader says:

Our merciful Father does not desire the death of sinners but rather that they should turn from their sins and have life. Let us pray that we who are sorry for our sins may fear no future evil and sin no more.
- Assisting minister:

Let us pray for the Church. That all God's people will remember their lonely, poor and forgotten brothers and sisters, by sharing their food, money and time with them this Lent and always. We pray to the Lord.
Lord, hear our prayer.

Let us pray for the leaders of the Church, especially our bishop and pastors. May God give them the wisdom to guide all of us to become holy in following Jesus. We pray to the Lord.
Lord, hear our prayer.

Let us pray for world peace. That those who lead our countries may do what is best for all the peoples of the world, especially the poor and needy, when they make important decisions. We pray to the Lord.
Lord, hear our prayer.

Let us pray for the poor and suffering in our world. May they find help, hope and comfort in the good works and sharing of God's people this Lent. We pray to the Lord.

Lord, hear our prayer.

Let us pray for each other. That God may give us His strength to be kind to pray, to share and to be kind to one another this Lent. We pray to the Lord.

Lord, hear our prayer.

Lord's Prayer

- After the intercessions, the leader invites all present to say the Lord's Prayer, in the following or similar words.

Now, in obedience to Christ himself, let us join in prayer to the Father, asking him to forgive us as we forgive others.

All: Our Father . . .

Concluding Rite

- The leader concludes by saying:

May the Father bless us, for he has adopted us as his children.

R. Amen.

May the Son come to help us, for he has received us as brothers and sisters.

R. Amen.

May the Spirit be with us, for he has made us his dwelling place.

R. Amen.

May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, + and bring us to everlasting life.

R. Amen.

Closing Prayer

- The leader says:

Let us pray. (After a brief period of silence.)

Father, our source of life, you know our weakness. May we reach out with joy to grasp your hand and to walk more readily in your ways. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

R. Amen.

- A suitable opening song may be sung.