



# CLOGHER DIOCESAN LITURGY COMMISSION

## Ash Wednesday 2021

### Liturgy Notes

#### The Ashes

The ashes that we so readily associate with the beginning of Lent came into the rite for Ash Wednesday from an earlier ritual for those required to do public penitence. In a later period, the rite was adapted in the more devotional form that we know so well. In time it gave its name to the day that opens the Lenten season.

The texts in the Missal make it clear that the distribution of the ashes is a key element of this rite:

Title: Blessing and Distribution of Ashes  
Invitation: ...these ashes, which we will put on our heads in penitence...  
Prayer 1: ...pour out the grace of your blessing on your servants who are marked with these ashes...  
Prayer 2: ...to bless these ashes which we intend to put upon our heads...

The widespread popularity of 'getting the ashes' says something about solidarity among the People of God as they begin the Lenten season. We should be cautious about blessing ashes which would be received only by the priest and one or two assisting ministers.

From the point of view of public health, we should also be cautious about offering an arrangement for people to pick up ashes at the church.

Since Masses on Ash Wednesday this year will be celebrated without the physical presence of the faithful, it will be more appropriate that the rite of the Ashes should be omitted. Mass should begin with the Penitential Rite in one of its usual forms, and the Prayer of the Faithful should follow directly on the homily.

#### Liturgy of the Word

Where for pastoral reasons only one reading is proclaimed before the Gospel, the text from St Paul (2 Cor 5.20 – 6.2) might be preferred. The Psalm may follow.

During Lent, the Alleluia in the Gospel acclamation is replaced by one of the phrases given in the Lectionary:

Praise to you, O Christ, King of eternal glory.  
Praise and honour to you, Lord Jesus!  
Glory and praise to you O Christ!  
Glory to you, O Christ, you are the Word of God!

Another similar phrase can be used, especially in musical settings.

It is good to note that this is an acclamation, and the participation of the people is important. Even in celebrations where people participate online, provision should be made for the people to join in the acclamation, by singing or saying the phrase in response to the cantor or reader, for example:

Cantor: Praise to you, O Christ, King of eternal glory.  
All: *Praise to you, O Christ, King of eternal glory.*  
Cantor: Harden not your hearts today,  
but listen to the voice of the Lord.  
All: *Praise to you, O Christ, King of eternal glory.*

*Liturgy is like a strong tree whose beauty is derived from the continuous renewal of its leaves,  
but whose strength comes from the old trunk, with solid roots in the ground.*

Pope Saint Paul VI



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## **The Homily**

In the Gospel text for Ash Wednesday (Mt 6:1-6. 16-18) Jesus insists that the three spiritual practices of almsgiving, prayer and fasting (penance) are essentially matters of the heart, beyond any outward observance.

As regards almsgiving and outreach towards those in need, support for the Trócaire Lenten campaign might be a timely theme. There is also the very practical matter of outreach to those who may feel isolated in our present circumstances. This is a commitment we might consider for Lent.

In relation to prayer, parish-based opportunities for shared prayer and devotion online can be encouraged, as well as from other sources. Families can consider if they might agree to some regular prayer together at home.

The reference in v 17 'put oil on your head and wash your face' may offer a point of reflection in a year when receiving the ashes is not possible. Our lives, rather than our foreheads, should bear the mark of our repentance.

The words of Pope Francis about ashes, quoted in the resources for use in the home, may also offer a point of reflection for today's homily.

## **Spiritual Communion**

Many people really appreciate the practice of a moment of spiritual Communion when they are following Mass online. A text suitable for use in Lent is attached. It can be shortened as indicated.

## **Prayer over the People**

The optional texts given in the missal are a distinctive element of the liturgy in Lent. The greeting: *The Lord be with you*, is followed by the invitation: *Bow down for the blessing*, and after the prayer the usual formula follows: *And may the blessing of almighty God the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit come down on you and remain with you for ever*.

In a lay-led liturgy, the prayer is used without the greeting and the trinitarian formula.

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## **An Act of Spiritual Communion in Lent**

*Lord Jesus, you are my Lord and Saviour.  
I turn to you, already present in my heart.  
To acknowledge your presence in this moment  
brings me strength and comfort.*

*I recall the words you used in the desert  
when you faced the Tempter,  
and I know I cannot live on bread alone.  
Keep your Word alive and fruitful in me.*

*\*You have given me the gift of life.  
In this time of Lent, revive my spirit  
and nourish me in my inmost self  
on my journey towards Easter*

*\*In all the circumstances of my life,  
help me to know the Father's will  
and to trust his plan for me, even in times of trial,  
confident that he desires only my highest good.*

*\*Confirm in me your Spirit of love and service.  
Help me to see the good that I can do  
and give me the will to do it.*

*May our communion in this moment of grace  
become at last the communion of heaven,  
with Mary and Joseph,  
and with all who have gone before me  
into the fullness of risen life  
with you, Lord Jesus,  
and with the Father and the Holy Spirit,  
for ever and ever. Amen.*

\* For a shorter version one or other of these paragraphs may be used alternately.