

ASH WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 17, 2021

Leader: The parishes of the Diocese of Ottawa sit on the unceded territory of the Algonquin people.

People: **May we dwell in unity and peace.**

Welcome to our online Zoom celebration of Ash Wednesday, Because of COVID-19, we are unable to gather as community in our beloved worship space, so we meet via the miracle of technology – regardless of the distances that divide us at present, we are still family in spirit. For those who have ashes with them, I would ask you to share the “signing of the Cross” with me at the appropriate time in the service – there is no canon or rule or law that says only clergy can do this. If you are with someone, you can “cross” each other.

Leader: Into your presence we come, Lord, for a few moments of quietness in a busy world, a busy life that demands our attention. Breathe on us now that we might know your presence and your power to see this day through.

Leader: Let us pray... Almighty and everlasting God, you despise nothing that you have made and forgive the sins of all those who are penitent. Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, lamenting our sins and acknowledging our brokenness, may obtain from you, the God of all mercies, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever. Amen

Leader: Jesus came into the Galilee, preaching the gospel of God and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the gospel.” He also said, “I have come that you may have life, and have that abundantly.”

People: We come before God this night, Ash Wednesday the beginning of Lent, to hear God’s Word, to confess our sins, and to ask God to strengthen us in our faith that we might live more holy lives.

The First Reading Joel 2: 1-2, 12-17

Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill.

Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming.

It is close at hand – a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness.

Like dawn spreading across the mountains a large and mighty army comes, such as never was in ancient times nor ever will be in ages to come.

“Even now,” declares the Lord, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.” Rend your heart and not your garments.

Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.

Who knows? He may turn and relent and leave behind a blessing - grain offerings and drink offerings for the Lord your God.

Blow the trumpet in Zion, declare a holy fast, call a sacred assembly. Gather the people, consecrate the assembly;
bring together the elders, gather the children, those nursing at the breast. Let the bridegroom leave his room and the bride her chamber. Let the priests, who minister before the Lord, weep between the portico and the altar.
Let them say, "Spare your people, Lord. Do not make your inheritance an object of scorn, a byword among the nations.
Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where is their God?'"

This is the word of the Lord
Thanks be to God

Psalm 103: 8-18

The Lord is full of compassion and mercy, slow to anger and of great kindness.

He will not always accuse us, nor will he keep his anger for ever.

He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor rewarded us according to our wickedness.

For as the heavens are high above the earth, so is his mercy great upon those who fear him.

As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our sins from us.

As a father cares for his children, so does the Lord care for those who fear him.

For he himself knows whereof we are made; he remembers that we are but dust.

Our days are like the grass; we flourish like a flower of the field;

When the wind goes over it, it is gone, and its place shall know it no more.

But the merciful goodness of the Lord endures for ever on those who fear him, and his righteousness on children's children;

On those who keep his covenant and remember his commandments and do them.

The Gospel

Reader The Lord be with you.

People **And also with you.**

Reader The Holy Gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ *according to the Blessed St. Matthew. 6: 1-6, 16-21*

People **Glory to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

"Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

"So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received

their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

The Gospel of Christ.

People Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

The Reflection for Ash Wednesday

It was three in the morning and pretty darned cold! It was as dark as pitch and as silent as a grave. It was disorienting and confusing. It was Ash Wednesday morning in the Sinai desert.

Grabbing an orange, we ran for the heated bus that was to take us to the place of departure. After a ten minute drive, we arrived in the parking lot, and found many other buses jockeying for position. After we disembarked, we were herded like lost little sheep down a narrow path until we emerged at the base of what our guide said was Mount Sinai. It being as black as coal, we had to rely on our guides for direction and within a few minutes, we were at the front of a long queue of people...and camels.

For some reason, certainly not by planning or seniority, I was at the front of the line and first taken by the arm and led into the looming darkness where my chariot (or rather camel) waited. My guide said, in very broken English, that “she good camel--hardly spit at all” which gave such assurance and comfort as I climbed up her back and settled between her humps. As I was getting used to where I was, she lurched forward and I nearly went headfirst onto the desert floor. I looked at my guide, a young boy named Ahmed who was leading the camel with a very thin piece of rope, and he said that all was good. Who was I to argue?

Up, up, up we went. Before me was nothing but the darkness of the night and the occasional splurble of light from Ahmed’s flashlight. Seeing nothing in front, I cautiously twisted my body so I could, as Joni Mitchell wrote, “look from where I came”. What a dazzling sight – behind me Mount Sinai was all a-shimmer as the lights from all the guides danced round and round as camels moved in a rhythm of normalcy for them, plodding ever onwards towards the summit. For almost an hour we moved and the day began to make a hint of itself as we got to the ending point – a large wooden shelter. Saying goodbye to Ahmed and his camel, I waited for the others and soon we were all breathlessly talking about the experience of a lifetime. The bishop told us that we weren’t “there” yet and pointed to the top of the mountain which lay another kilometer or so ahead. So, off we went, pulling our kaffirs around us to ward off the early morning cold and in time and with some mutual armgrabs and pushes from behind we were there at the summit just as the sun broke over the other hills that

surround Sinai. Imagine – Sunrise on Sinai: it was so powerful an experience that I can still some thirty-five years later sense and smell the moment.

As we reached the summit, Bishop John called us together and said that he wanted to pray for and with us and drew from his parka a plastic bag – ashes for Ash Wednesday from the Cathedral in Ottawa. And there, at the place where Moses stood, the place where Moses spoke with God and lived to tell the tale; the place where words on stone became words to live by; the place where night and day met and kissed – there, on that high place, Bishop John signed and sealed us with the words, “Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return...”

These words remind us that we are finite – that we all will leave this mortal coil as our forbearers have and join all the saints. They are not intended to be downers to us but rather reminders: reminders that we have been created and birthed for a purpose – to love God with all our hearts and minds and souls and spirits and to love our neighbours as we love ourselves. That is the heart and soul of our being here in this present – to, as St. Teresa of Avila wrote so long ago, “Christ has now no body on earth but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes through which Christ’s compassion is to look out on the world. Yours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good; yours are the hands with which he is still to bless now.”

In this season of Lent, may we be made more and more conscious of our calling to be as Christ to one another and to strangers who cross our path; may we see where we have gone astray and with true hearts, turn and embrace the Lord as he waits to embrace us; may this Lent be a time of re-newal and re-freshment in the realization that it is not what we say in our days upon this good earth that matter as much as the actions we take in the name of our Jesus, friend, Redeemer and brother.

Amen

The Liturgy of The Ashes:

Leader: My sisters and brothers in Christ, every year at the time of the Christian Passover we celebrate our redemption through the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Lent is the time to prepare for this celebration and to renew our life in the Paschal mystery. We begin this holy season by remembering our need for repentance, and for the mercy and forgiveness proclaimed in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We begin our journey to Easter with the sign of ashes, speaking of the frailty and uncertainty of human life, and marking the penitence of the community as a whole. I invite you therefore, in the name of the Lord, to observe a holy Lent by self-examination, penitence and prayer, fasting and alms-giving, and by reading and meditating on the Word of God.

Psalm 51

Refrain: Create in me a clean heart, O God.

Leader: Have mercy on me, O God, according to your loving-kindness; in your great compassion, blot out my offences; wash me through and through from my wickedness and cleanse me from my sin ...**Refrain**

For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight ...**Refrain**

Create in me as clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence; do not take your Holy Spirit from me ...**Refrain**

And so you are justified when you speak and upright in your judgment. Indeed, I have been wicked from my birth, a sinner from my mother's womb ...**Refrain**

For behold, you look for truth deep within me, and will make me understand wisdom secretly. Purge me from my sin and I shall be pure; wash me and I shall be clean indeed ...**Refrain**

Make me hear of joy and gladness, that the body you have broken may rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquities ...**Refrain**

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence and take not your Holy Spirit from me ...**Refrain**

Give me the joy of your saving help again and sustain me with your bountiful spirit. I shall teach your ways to the wicked, and sinners shall return to you ...**Refrain**

Deliver me from death, O God, and my tongue shall sing of your righteousness, O God of my salvation. Open my lips, O Lord, and my mouth shall proclaim your praise ...**Refrain**

Had you desired it, I would have offered sacrifice, but you take no delight in burnt offerings. The sacrifice of God is a troubled spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise ...**Refrain**

Leader: Let us come before God in faith, confessing to the Lord and one another our manifold sins and asking God for healing grace and peace upon us.

Most holy and merciful Father, we confess to you, to one another, and to the whole communion of saints in heaven and on earth, that we have sinned against you by our own fault in thought, word and deed; by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart, and mind and strength. We have not loved our neighbours as we have loved ourselves. We have not forgiven others as we have been forgiven.

People: Have mercy on us, Lord.

We have been deaf to your call to serve others as Christ has served us. We have not been true to the mind of Christ. We have grieved your Holy Spirit.

People: Have mercy on us, Lord.

We confess to you all our past unfaithfulness; the pride, hypocrisy and impatience in our lives.

People: Have mercy on us, Lord.

Our self-indulgent appetites and ways, and our exploitation of other people.

People: We confess to you, Lord.

Our anger at our own frustration, and our envy of those who are more fortunate than us.

People: We confess to you, Lord.

Our intemperate love of worldly goods and comforts, and our dishonesty in our daily life and work.

People: We confess to you, Lord.

Our negligence in prayer and worship, and our failure to commend the faith that is within us.

People: We confess to you, Lord.

Accept our repentance, Lord, for the wrongs we have done; for our blindness to human need and suffering, and our indifference to injustice and cruelty.

People: Accept our repentance, Lord.

For all false judgments, for uncharitable thoughts towards our neighbours and for our prejudice and contempt towards those who differ from us.

People: Accept our repentance, Lord.

For our waste and pollution of your creation, and our lack of concern for those who come after us.

People: Accept our repentance, Lord.

Restore us good Lord, and let your anger depart from us.

People: Hear us, Lord, for your mercy is great.

The Imposition of Ashes

Leader: These ashes were once trees and shrubs and branches of palm, and from places where life was lived to the fullest. Once they were full of life. Now they are black and grey; dirty and lifeless. But mixed with the oil and water of baptism, they make good fertilizer: it will help the seeds of the gospel to take deeper root within us and bring forth the fruits, the harvest of justice, peace and generosity. These are ashes worth wearing. May we accept this gift and be blessed. (Jessica Gazzola from Liturgy Outside adapted)

Lord, grant us a simplicity of faith and a generosity of service that gives without counting the cost; a life overflowing with grace, poured out from the One who gave everything so that we might show others the power of love to a broken world and share the truth from a living Word. Grant us simplicity of faith and a yearning to share it. Loving God, you created us from the dust of the earth; may these ashes be a sign of our penitence and our mortality, and a reminder that only by the Cross do we receive eternal life. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Saviour. Amen

Ashes are now shared. As you make the sign of the Cross on yourself or others, say these words: "Remember that you are dust and to the dust you shall return".

Leader: Let us pray as our Lord and Saviour has gifted to his church,

Our Father.....

Leader: Lent is a time to take the time, to let the power of our faith story take hold of us, a time to let the events get up and walk around in us, to time to intensify our living unto Christ, a time to hover over the thoughts of our hearts; a time to place our feet into the streets of Jerusalem or to walk along the sea and listen to his Word; a time to touch his robe and feel his healing love surge through us, a time to ponder and a time to wonder... Lent is a time to allow a fresh new taste of God! (Lent by Ann Weems from [Kneeling in Jerusalem](#))

An Affirmation and Blessing

Leader: May we know the love of the heavenly Father deep within us; may we understand our significance in the centre of his family and the bonds that hold us close as sisters and brothers. May we understand the lengths that He was prepared to go through for us and freely respond in the Today which He has given us to cherish. And that peace of God which passes all our understanding keep our hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of our Lord Jesus Christ; and the blessing of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit be with you and yours and those who love you this night and always. Amen.

Let us go forth in peace.

People: Thanks be to God