

WEDNESDAY 17 FEBRUARY

SERVICE FOR ASH WEDNESDAY: THE BEGINNING OF LENT

The Gathering of God's People

The sacrifice of God is a broken spirit: a broken and contrite heart you will not despise.

Lord, have mercy.

In these or other suitable words, the presiding minister explains the meaning of Lent and invites the people to observe it faithfully.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: since the early days 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 of Lent was observed by those who were preparing for baptism at Easter and by those who were to be restored to the Church's fellowship from which they had been separated through sin. In course of time the Church came to recognize that, by a careful keeping of these days, all Christians might take to heart the call to repentance and the assurance of forgiveness proclaimed in the gospel and so grow in faith and in devotion to our Lord.

I invite you, therefore, in the name of the Lord to observe a holy Lent, by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God's holy word.

THE COLLECT

Silence is kept

Let us pray for grace to keep Lent faithfully.

**Almighty and everlasting God
you hate 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 may be truly sorry for our sins
and obtain from you, the God of all mercy,
perfect remission and forgiveness;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Proclaiming and Receiving the Word

THE GOSPEL

St. Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

'Beware of practising your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

'So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

'And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But whenever 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.

'And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

'Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

ADDRESS

ANTHEM

Wash me thoroughly, music by S.S. Wesley

Wash me thoroughly from my wickedness, and forgive me all my sin. For I acknowledge my faults, and my sin is ever before me.

based on Ps. 51:2-3

The Liturgy of Penitence

Let us now call to mind our sin and the infinite mercy of God.

Make our hearts clean, O God,
and renew a right spirit within us.

Father eternal, giver of light and grace, we have sinned against you and against our neighbour, in what we have said and done, through ignorance, through weakness, through our own deliberate fault. We have wounded your love, and marred your image in us. We are sorry and ashamed, and repent of all our sins. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, who died for us, forgive us all that is past; and lead us out from darkness to walk as children of light. Amen.

God our Father, the strength of all who put their trust in you, mercifully accept our prayers; and because, in our weakness, we can do nothing good without you, grant us the help of your grace, that in keeping your commandments we may please you, both in will and deed; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Prayers of Intercession

Let us pray to the Father, who loved the world so much that he sent his only Son to give us life.

O God our Creator, whose good earth is entrusted to our care and delight and tenderness, we pray:
May those who sow in tears
reap with shouts of joy.

For all who depend on the earth for their daily food and fuel, whose forests are destroyed for the profits of a few.
May those who sow in tears
reap with shouts of joy.

For all who labour in poverty, who are oppressed by unjust laws, who are banned from speaking the truth, who long for a harvest of justice.
May those who sow in tears
reap with shouts of joy.

For all who are in captivity to greed and waste and boredom, whose harvest is choked with things they do not need.
May those who sow in tears
reap with shouts of joy.

Turn us again from our captivity and restore our vision, that our mouth may be filled with laughter and our tongue with singing.
May those who sow in tears
reap with shouts of joy.

Sending Out

Lord our God, grant us grace to desire you with our whole heart; that so desiring, we may seek and find you; and so finding, may love you; and so loving, may hate those sins from which you have delivered us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.