

Ash Wednesday Service

1. This service is an ancient tradition, which centres on our mortality and on the confession of sin before God. This dual focus is maintained in the light of God's redeeming love in Jesus Christ. While we are called to acknowledge our sinfulness in this service, it also calls us to set our direction towards the cross and beyond. This is the nature of repentance. To turn from our sinful way and to turn to Christ.
2. This service is intended primarily for use on Ash Wednesday. Where this is not possible it may be used on the first Sunday in Lent by using the normal Lent 1 Readings and prayers, however, after the sermon, the section of the Ash Wednesday Service from section 10 "Invitation to the Observance of the Lenten Discipline" may be used.
3. The Ashes should be clearly seen by the congregation and remain in full view of the congregation throughout Lent. The imposition of the Ashes may be optional for members of the congregation. The invitation is an open one.
4. This service is solemn in nature and commences with silence. The use of Ashes is a sign of our mortality. From dust we come and to dust we return.
5. Traditionally the palm leaves or crosses from the previous Palm Sunday are brought back to the Church for burning to create the ash for the service. The arranging for a suitable receptacle for burning will need to be planned very carefully. If this is done the action should take place clearly in view of the people.
6. Note that the ash should be ground into a fine powder with a pestle or spoon. The minister placing the ash on the foreheads of the people or on the palm of the hand, using the thumb to mark a sign of the cross. A small damp towel should be available for those who impose ashes on the foreheads of the people /the palms of their hand.
7. If the Lord's Supper is not included in the service, it may conclude with the singing of the Agnus Dei (Lamb of God) instead of a hymn. See the versions in Sing Alleluia 99g or 100e or Together in Song 756 ff.
8. At section 16 below as Iona Psalm may be used. See, "Psalms of patience, protest and praise" John L. Bell, Wild Goose Publications, the Iona Community, Glasgow.
9. TIS stands for "Together in Song" while AHB means "Australian Hymn Book".
10. For more details of this service see, "Book of Common Worship" Presbyterian Church, USA, Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993 or the "Handbook of the Christian Year" by Hickman, Saliers, Stookey, White - Abingdon Press.

An Outline for this Service

The Gathering of the People of God

Call to Worship

Prayer of the Day

Hymn, Song (568 TIS or 476 AHB - O for a heart to praise my God *or*
TIS 23, 72 or 18, 22, 130 AHB)

The Service of the Word

Prayer for Illumination

First Reading - Joel 2:1-2, 12-17; or Isaiah 58:1-12

Second Reading - 2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10

Hymn, Song (546 TIS / 122 AHB Lord Jesus think on me *or*
(576 TIS / 488 AHB O for a closer walk with God)

Gospel Reading - Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Sermon

Invitation to the Observance of the Lenten Discipline

The following or similar words may be spoken:

Friends in Christ,
every year at this time we celebrate our redemption
through the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Lent is a time to prepare for this celebration
and to renew our life in the Easter mystery.
We begin this holy season by acknowledging
our need for repentance,
and for the mercy and forgiveness
proclaimed in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We are aware of the harsh reality of bushfires
on the Australian landscape;
reducing all before it to ash;
reminding us that
we are dust.
Bushfires also have a cleansing and purifying action
where the land is stripped and broken open
that new life may emerge.

The sign of ash signifies our need
for self-examination and penitence
during this holy season of Lent
that we may be broken open

and prepared for new life as the baptised people of God.

The minister holds the Ashes up for all to see and says:

We begin our journey to Easter with the sign of ashes.
This ancient sign speaks of the frailty and uncertainty of human life,
and is a sign of hope for a repentant community.

The minister continues:

I invite you, therefore, in the name of Christ,
to observe a holy Lent
by prayer and fasting,
by works of love,
and by reading and meditating on the Word of God.
Let us bow before God, our Creator and Redeemer,
and confess our sin.

Psalm 51:1-17 (See Uniting in Worship, People's Book, Page289f)

This Psalm is read responsively or the Ten Commandments is used.

An Alternative version of this Psalm is found in Leslie F Brandt's Meditations on the Psalms.

This Psalm could be used, as a prayer of confession in place of the Litany of Penitence below.

Litany of Penitence

[Imposition of Ashes]

Hymn - (546 TIS / 122 AHB Lord Jesus think on me
or 577 TIS / 490 AHB Come, let us to the Lord our God,
or any of the following Iona Psalms 25, 31, 40, 42, 56, 130)

The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper

Invitation to the Lord's Table

Great Thanksgiving

Lord's Prayer

Breaking of the Bread

Lamb of God

The Communion

If the Eucharist is not celebrated:

Prayer

[Offering]

The Sending Forth of the People of God

Hymn, Song - (463 TIS / 396 AHB May this Lenten Discipline *or*
572 TIS / 486 AHB O thou who camest from above)

Word of Mission

Blessing

Dismissal