



CELEBRATING AT HOME  
**ASH WEDNESDAY**

*Come back to me with all your heart (Joel 2:12)*



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## ASH WEDNESDAY

### Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit.

**Amen.**

### Preparing to hear the Word

We stand in your presence, O God;  
**and we praise your holy name.**

May your mercy be upon us, O Lord;  
**as we place our trust in you.**

Show us your mercy and love;  
**and grant us your salvation.**

### First Reading – Joel 2:12-18 (abridged)

A reading from the prophet Joel.

‘Now, now – it is the Lord who speaks –  
come back to me with all your heart,  
fasting, weeping, mourning.’

Let your hearts be broken, not your garments torn,  
turn to the Lord your God again,  
for he is all tenderness and compassion,  
slow to anger, rich in graciousness,  
and ready to relent.

The word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

### Gospel Reading - Matthew 6:1-6,16-18

A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew.

Jesus said to his disciples: ‘Be careful not to parade your good deeds before men to attract their notice; by doing this you will lose all reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give alms, do not have it trumpeted before you; this is what the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets to win men’s admiration. I tell you solemnly, they have had their reward. But when you give alms, your left hand must not know what your right is doing; your almsgiving must be secret, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you.

‘And when you pray, do not imitate the hypocrites: they love to say their prayers standing up in the

synagogues and at the street corners for people to see them; I tell you solemnly, they have had their reward. But when you pray, go to your private room and, when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in that secret place, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you.

‘When you fast do not put on a gloomy look as the hypocrites do: they pull long faces to let men know they are fasting. I tell you solemnly, they have had their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that no one will know you are fasting except your Father who sees all that is done in secret; and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you.’

The Gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ!**

### Reflection

In Lent we begin our journey to the great feast of Easter. That journey begins in ashes today and ends in light at the East Vigil. Fire is a profound part of our national experience. We know its power to destroy, blacken and reduce to ash. We know that evil can do the same - destroy our wholeness of spirit, blacken our lives and reduce the beauty of human life to so much dust.

We begin Lent in the ash of acknowledging our own part in harbouring, creating and doing evil - those places in our hearts where the fire of anger, bitterness, selfishness or narrowness of mind and heart has left nothing but cold ash.

The ash is also a reminder that our true life is not found in mortal things which eventually turn to dust, but in eternal things. We also know that out of ash new life can bud, grow strong, bloom into fullness - that’s the Easter miracle.

In Lent we allow ourselves to be tempted out of the ash of selfishness and narrowness of heart and into a life of open-hearted goodness. We celebrate God’s graciousness to us by sharing what we have with those in need whether it be food, wealth, time, love, friendship or compassion. That’s what it means to ‘repent and believe the Good News’.

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So our penance is not a self-imposed punishment for sinfulness. It is a sign of our gratitude to God for the forgiveness and healing we receive in Christ.

Whatever form our penance takes it should always result in a benefit for others. For example, our self-examination might lead us to know what we need to fast from in order to live better. Perhaps we need to fast from being so critical of each other so that others are spared our negativity; perhaps from too much work in order to be with those we love more; perhaps from our ceaseless activity so that we can put a little breath back into our lives, to spend a little more time becoming aware of God's presence, making us easier people to live with.

*Quiet time for reflection*

### Rite of Penance and Ashes

Our Father, you come to us  
with your gracious and gentle touch,  
to reveal and remove our sins  
and the faithless practices which hold us down,  
spoil our effectiveness,  
and destroy our wholeness of spirit.

**Grant us, therefore,  
the gift of true repentance  
that we may know the beauty of your peace.**

Christ our Lord, you bid us to love one another.  
Free us from narrow and selfish ways.  
Remind us that you came not to be served,  
but to serve.

**Teach us to forgive,  
to let go of old resentments;  
to care even in the face of hostility and rejection;  
to love each other as you have loved us.**

Holy Spirit, comforter, consoler,  
give us the courage to seek  
fresh guidance from the Word,  
wisdom to discern between good and evil,  
**comfort when we are disheartened,  
strength in times of trial,  
and your love in all things.**

*All stretch out their hands over the bowl of ash*

Father of mercy,  
bless these ashes  
and all who wear them.  
They mark our failure and your mercy.  
**As we make our Lenten journey  
guided by your Spirit  
bring us to life with the Risen Christ  
who lives and reigns with you for ever and ever.  
Amen.**

*The leader asks those present*

Will you change your hearts and be faithful to the Gospel?  
**We will!**

*The ash is sprinkled over the head of each person*

### Closing Prayer

Touch us once more with your life-giving love;  
heal our broken hearts with your tenderness,  
strengthen our flagging spirits with your hope,  
awaken us with your light.

**Lead us throughout these Lenten days  
from sin and darkness and death,  
to the freedom, light and life  
your Son won for us.  
This we ask, Father of mercies,  
through that same Christ our Lord.  
Amen.**

### Blessing

May the Lord bless us,  
keep us from all evil  
and lead us to life everlasting.  
**Amen.**



# Journey into the Light

This resource is presented by the Carmelites for use by individuals, families and small groups as a prayerful celebration of the Word of God to help prepare us to celebrate the Eucharist with our worshipping communities. We are conscious that Christ is present not only in the Blessed Sacrament but also in the Scriptures and in our hearts. We are also conscious of the many people who, for various reasons including sickness and infirmity, cannot physically attend the Eucharist. Even when we are on our own we remain part of the Body of Christ.

In the room you decide to use for this prayer you could have a lighted candle, a crucifix and the Bible. These symbols help keep us mindful of the sacredness of our time of prayer and can help us feel connected with our local worshipping communities.

This text is arranged with parts for a leader and for all to pray, but the leader's parts can be shared among those present.

As you use this prayer know that the Carmelites will be remembering in our prayer all the members of our family.



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