



Household Liturgy for Ash Wednesday

Opening

Summarize the purpose of Ash Wednesday and the season of Lent. Use the summary below from The Worship Sourcebook.

Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent. By the fourth century the Western church had determined that the Lenten period of fasting and renewal should correspond to Christ's forty-day fast (Matt. 4:2), and, by counting forty days back from Easter (excluding Sundays, which remain "feast" days), arrived at the Wednesday seven weeks before Easter. At one time Lent was primarily viewed as a period during which converts prepared for baptism on Easter Sunday, but later the season became a general time of penitence and renewal for all Christians. Thus Ash Wednesday became the day that marked the beginning of the Lenten renewal.

The aim of Ash Wednesday worship is threefold: to meditate on our mortality, sinfulness, and need of a savior; to renew our commitment to daily repentance in the Lenten season and in all of life; and to remember with confidence and gratitude that Christ has conquered death and sin. Ash Wednesday worship, then, is filled with gospel truth. It is a witness to the power and beauty of our union with Christ and to the daily dying and rising with Christ that this entails.

The imposition of ashes is often a central part of the worship service. Ashes have a long history in biblical and church traditions. In Scripture ashes or dust symbolize frailty or death (Gen. 18:27), sadness or mourning (Esther 4:3), judgment (Lam. 3:16), and repentance (Jon. 3:6). Some traditions also have considered ash a purifying or cleansing agent. All these images are caught up in the church's use of ashes as a symbol appropriate for Lent. In Christ's passion we see God's judgment on evil; in our penitence we express sorrow and repentance for our sins; in our rededication we show that we are purified and renewed. The ashes, which often are the burnt residue of the previous year's palms from Palm Sunday, are often mixed with a little water and carried in a small dish. As the leader goes from worshiper to worshiper, or as worshipers come forward, the leader dips a finger in the moist ash and makes a cross on each person's forehead (the "imposition"), saying words such as "Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return," or, "Consider yourself dead to sin and alive in Jesus Christ."

In order to prepare ashes for this service, simply mix ashes with a little bit of olive oil (about 1 teaspoon of ash with a couple drops of oil). Get ashes from your fireplace or simply burn some paper outside in a fireproof container.



Household Liturgy for Ash Wednesday

Opening Prayer

Leader: O Lord our God, long-suffering and full of compassion:
Be present with us as we enter this season
in which we recall our Savior's sufferings and celebrate his triumph.
Give us your Holy Spirit,
so that as we acknowledge our sins and implore your pardon,
we may also have the strength to deny ourselves
and be upheld in times of temptation
through Jesus Christ, our Lord.
And all God's people say ...

Household: **Amen.**

Scripture Readings

Choose one or all of the passages to read. Get a Bible and either (1) have a different person read each passage or (2) pick one passage and each person read a portion of that passage.

Old Testament: Isaiah 58:1-12

Psalm: Psalm 51:1-17

New Testament: 2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10

Reflection

As you prepare this Ash Wednesday for the season of Lent, discuss as a household how you may participate in the practices of (1) prayer; (2) fasting; and (3) service.

- *Prayer: begin a new routine of daily prayer; read through the Psalm or a prayer book; commit to praying regularly for a person or ministry, etc.*
- *Fasting: commit to fasting from one thing as a household in addition to individual fasts. Think of fasting as replacing something you normally practice (e.g. fast from social media but commit to meals with friends/family; instead of checking phone first thing in the morning or night commit to a time of prayer; instead of reading an online journal start a Bible reading plan; instead of drinking alcohol call a friend you lost touch with, etc.)*
- *Service: start a new volunteer role in your local church or with a non-profit in your neighborhood, donate to a new charity, invite someone new to dinner with your family, etc.*



Household Liturgy for Ash Wednesday

Imposition of the Ashes

Now take ashes and make the sign of the cross on one another's forehead saying:

Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.

If you don't have ashes, then feel free to simply make the cross on one another's forehead without ashes.

Another approach is to take a piece of paper and write or draw some things you are praying for, or things you committed to in the above discussion, for Lent. Then carefully burn your paper into ash in your fireplace or outside in a fireproof container.

Prayer

Respond with this prayer.

Leader: Lord God, it is hard to think that we will die someday. We dream, make plans, and talk about what we'll do in the near future. We don't always think about what you want. Instead, we make choices that we think are good for us. But we are only here because you take care of us. We confess that we forget we need you all the time. We confess that sometimes we make choices that aren't what you want. We don't know what is best for our lives. Holy God, we are sorry for our sin. Help us to remember we live because of you. Help us to do what you want us to do through Jesus, our Lord.

Household: **Amen.**

Gospel Reading

Read Matthew 6:1-6; 16-21

Closing Blessing

Leader: May God the Father, who does not despise the broken spirit, give you a contrite heart.
May Christ, who bore our sins in his body on the tree, heal you by his wounds.
May the Holy Spirit, who leads us into all truth, speak to you words of pardon and peace. Amen.