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## Ash Wednesday - 2 March 2022

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## 2 March 2022

### Ash Wednesday

Reflection by Gerard Moore

## Introduction

In more usual times Australian Catholics have had a melange of 'ashen' customs and have even discovered some in indigenous life. There are *mardi gras* traditions, Shrove Tuesday practices, ashes from the family hearth, ashes in the old backyard incinerator, ashes from the passing bushfires that regenerated the flora. As second peoples we have built a greater appreciation for the smoking ceremonies of indigenous Australians, with their theology of purification, clothing in smoke, and a hint of healing eucalyptus.

But these are not usual times. Our bushfires no longer burn and pass through. They incinerate and leave destruction. The ash that remains has little of regeneration, rather is the final resting of plants, trees, insects and wildlife. It is the detritus of homes and farms and lives destroyed in a way we have never witnessed previously, and which we will continue to experience in the future.

With the giving of the ashes there is also the reminder that we are dust. So much dust blows across our continent due to poor practice exacerbated by changing climate. The more the topsoil is scattered and blown the closer we are to starvation. There is a chilling sense that the dust that fills our skies presages that we too are in danger of being turned to dust because we are unable to produce food.

There must be, and indeed there is, a catholic response, a Christian rejoinder. Pope Francis offers a fresh Lenten discipline in *Laudato Si*. He is insistent that we take notice that graced creation is endangered by human action, by our actions and our decisions collectively and individually. He is fully conscious that the regeneration of our planet entails a new discipline, a reckoning with how we treat creation, and a faith fuelled imagination that brings grace and life to the fore. This is a Lent prayed with fires, floods, unimagined temperatures, and a pandemic in mind.

There are some factors which bring comfort in this. The origins of the word 'lent' are in the old English and old German languages where the word signifies the 'lengthening' of the days. The word lent signifies hope in the end of winter, the coming of spring, the growth of crops, the arrival of the new-born animals. Lent heralds hope. As well, it is a time of 'penance', however we have been led to mistake penance for pain. There is a real element of truth in this, but the Latin roots of the word penance do not speak of endurance but of conversion of heart. A penitential period is a time of conversion. The dust itself can be a sign of our interconnection with all things. Australian theologian Denis Edwards reminds us that we are made from stardust! And finally, the prayers of the Roman tradition speak of the joy of

fasting! As unusual as this sounds to us, this refresh, this reset, speaks hope and renewal.

This year we are not just entering a post-COVID Lent but a time to take up a new conversion and a deeper appreciation of the grace of creation and our creaturely role in this grace.

## **Penitential Act**

Use one of the *Roman Missal* texts or this optional litany form:

Lord Jesus, you came so that we could repent deeply from our heart.  
Lord, have mercy.

You teach us to pray without hypocrisy.  
Christ, have mercy.

You teach us to fast with joy.  
Lord, have mercy.

## **First Reading**

### **Joel 2:12-18**

The prophet reminds the people of the fidelity of God, who in mercy abandons neither the land nor the people.

## **Responsorial Psalm**

### **Psalm 51: 3-4, 5-6ab, 12-13, 14,14**

*Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.*

This psalm is used many times throughout the year in the Liturgy of the Hours as well as the readings for Mass. It speaks very poignantly of our need for mercy but does not speak from an introspective point of view but rather of the amazing power of God's forgiveness. God will create a pure heart in us and give us the joy of God's help.

## **Second Reading**

### **2 Corinthians 5:20-6:2**

In Christ all things are reconciled to God, and we are transformed into the divine life.

## Gospel Reading

### Matthew 6:1-6; 16-18

Our good deeds, our fasting and our discipline are richest when done in God's sight rather than paraded in the sight of all.

## Reflection

Our reading from Joel has an interesting set of dynamics. It begins with the prophet speaking on behalf of the Lord, who invites the people to repent. The initiative is God's: it is the Lord who wishes for the people to move from their current state and return.

Yet the 'voice' then changes to that of the prophet and his urging the people. As a prophet he holds out that God is merciful and may offer forgiveness. There is a tension between how God is inviting the people, and an anxiety amongst the people that this means punishment. The prophet reminds of the mercy of God.

But the return must be marked by action: prayer, fasting, a single will amongst the whole community, offerings and priestly prayers. To return to the Lord is a visible and tangible set of actions.

With these actions is a particular theology, one easily overlooked. The petition of the priests is that God be glorified, and in particular be glorified in faithfully restoring the people. How would God be seen by other nations if the divinity abandoned the chosen people? It is an interesting argument, but seemingly persuasive. Our passage closes with God stirred to concern for this special land and to pity for the people.

We have with Joel a lively passage and a call to action. Perhaps it is time, with this Lent, to call the assembly and be actively mindful of God's concern for the land. How are we to respond to this concern?

Paul calls for reconciliation with God, and brings to centre stage his theology of sin overcome in Christ. He speaks of our sins as individuals, and in various passages sets this within the sinfulness of humanity and its effects on creation. With this comes an urgency: 'now' is the time. There is an apocalyptic streak in Paul, and in the early Christian communities, that Christ's return was imminent. The cry to be 'ready' is a reminder that each day could be the day of salvation so we should live accordingly.

There is certainly a sense in *Laudato Si!* that now is the day, and that there is an urgency in our response to the effects of sin around us. With Paul there is a larger sense of reconciliation at play: reconciliation with all creation, and in that reconciliation with God.

We cannot let Lent be a time for considering our personal sins only, but place ourselves within the necessary reconciliation of all things.

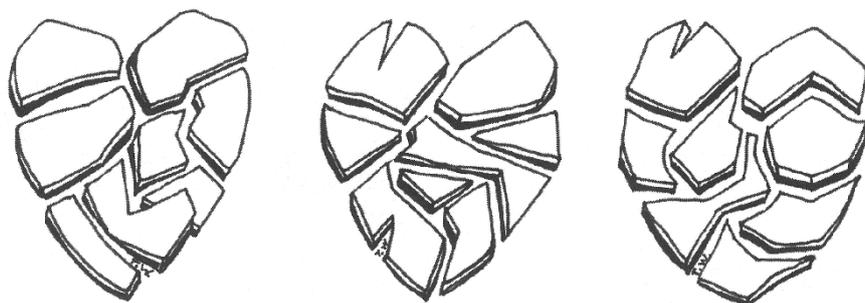
From Matthew's Gospel we have an inspiring admonition to keep our efforts hidden so that we are more sure that our purification and penance are for the right motives –

to be seen by God rather than to be seen by others. There is a wonderful self-effacement in this, which itself is an act of inner conversion. The point that Matthew is making does not need a lot of clarification!

So then, how do we enter Lent? Our readings offer some direction if we are to take seriously the ecological conversion to which Pope Francis is calling us. The prophet Joel offers action, and behind this is the unwavering commitment of God to the 'land', to creation itself. Paul speaks of sin, but his context is the reconciliation of all things in Christ, and the immediacy of living a reconciled life. We are challenged here to live as creatures amongst creation within the sacramentality of Christ's creation and his taking flesh. The Gospel calls for ongoing inner conversion of heart, for taking up the practices of penitential discipline and the invitation they offer to our ongoing interior purification.

Perhaps we should close with the words of Pope Francis:

This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life. This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she 'groans in travail' (*Rom 8:22*). We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth (cf. *Gen 2:7*); our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters. (*Laudato Si 2*)



*Be merciful, O God, for we have sinned.*

# Prayer of the Faithful

## Introduction

In this special celebration of joyful penitence, we turn to our God with the needs of the Church, the world and our community.

## Petitions

We pray for the leaders of our Church, both ordained and lay. May they lead us in joyful fasting and abundant trust in God's mercy so that we may all offer a visible sign of God's presence in the world.

*(Pause)* Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for the members of the Plenary Council. May they be strengthened in their efforts in this period between the two Assemblies as they prepare material for the future of our Church.

*(Pause)* Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for leaders throughout the world that they may continue to work together to deal with the current pandemic and find solutions for peaceful interactions.

*(Pause)* Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for all those suffering from an inability to forgive that is driving them to bitterness. May our witness to the forgiveness of God be a catalyst for them to change and find a better balance in their lives.

*(Pause)* Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for ourselves that God will create in us a new heart so that we will follow Jesus' way of peace and love with renewed vigour.

*(Pause)* Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray that our community will increase in its spirit of self-denial and therefore extend our efforts in helping others in their need.

*(Pause)* Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for our world community that we may learn to respect the earth and listen to Pope Francis' cry to change our ways of using the gifts of creation.

*(Pause)* Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

## Conclusion

We stand before our merciful God with these needs in the sure knowledge that they will be answered through God's profound mercy. We make our prayer in the name of Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

**Amen.**

## Music selections by Alessio Loiacono and Chris deSilva

### GA

A new heart for a new world. T Watts/M O'Brien. 438  
Ashes. T Conry. 209  
Grant to us, O Lord. L Deiss. 303  
Hosea. G Norbet. 213  
Return to God. M Haugen. 304  
Though the mountains may fall. D Schutte. 453  
Tree of life. M Haugen. 307  
Yes, I shall arise. L. Deiss. 214

### AOV1

A new heart for a new world. T Watts/M O'Brien. 158  
Be reconciled as one. C Willcock SJ. 162  
Hosea. G Norbet. 30  
God of my salvation. G Norbet. 68  
Though the mountains may fall. D Schutte. 182

### AOV2

Ashes. T Conry. 16  
Heal me, O God. G Norbet. 52

### AOV4Kids

We want to live like you, Jesus. S Wolf. 32

### CWB

Create in me. Marty Haugen. 664  
Forgive our sins as we forgive. Rosamund E. Herklots. 680  
God of mercy and compassion. Michael Hodgetts. 692  
Grant to us, O Lord, a heart renewed. Lucien Deiss. 698  
Hosea. Gregory Norbet OSB. 715  
Lord Jesus, as we turn from sin. Ralph Wright OSB. 735  
May this Lenten discipline. James Phillip McAuley. 746  
O Father, I know I can count on your mercy. Kathleen Boschetti MSC. 762  
O God, creator of us all. Stanbrook Abbey. 764  
Our Father, we have wandered. Kevin Nichols. 784  
The glory of these forty days. Gregory the Great, tr. Maurice F. Bell. 825

### CWBII

#### *Sunday by Sunday hymn suggestions*

Again we keep this solemn fast. Ascr. Gregory the Great, tr. Peter J. Scagnelli. 285  
Bring us back to you, O Lord our God. Jean-Paul Lécot and Sr Lucia Fay. 287  
Forty days and forty nights. George Hunt Smyttan, alt. Francis Pott. 288  
From ashes to the living font. Alan J. Hommerding. 289 (vv. 1, 2, 4)  
Grant to us, O Lord. Lucien Deiss CSSp. 291  
Hear us, almighty Lord/*Attende Domine*. Tr. Ralph Wright, OSB. 292  
Return to God. Marty Haugen. 298  
The glory of these forty days. Gregory the Great, tr. Maurice F. Bell. 301  
*Additional selections by Chris deSilva*

Forgive our sins as we forgive. Rosamond E. Herklots. 120  
Lord Jesus, as we turn from sin. Ralph Wright OSB. 294  
May this Lenten discipline. James Phillip McAuley. 295  
Create a clean heart in me, O God. The Grail/ICEL. 478

### **S&S1**

Be merciful, O Lord. Steve Angrisano. 66

### **S&S2**

Be merciful, O Lord. Jeff Thomas. 257  
Create a clean heart. Cyprian Consiglio. 302  
40 days. Matt Maher. 310

## **Psalms Selected by Chris deSilva and Angela McCarthy**

Psalm 50: *Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.*  
Psalm 50: Douglas Mews. CWB 202  
Psalm 51: Be merciful, O Lord: Christopher Willcock. GA 41  
Psalm 51 (50): Jenny O'Brien. JOBA pg. 28  
Be merciful, O Lord: Paul Mason. PM pg. 41  
Be merciful, O Lord: Marty Haugen. LPFS pg. 20

## **Seasonal Psalms for Lent Selected by Chris deSilva**

Psalm 50: *Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.*  
Be Merciful, O Lord. Douglas Mews. CWB 202  
Psalm 51: Be Merciful, O Lord/Create a Clean Heart. The Grail. GA 41  
Psalm 51 (50): Jenny O'Brien. JOBA pg. 28  
Be Merciful, O Lord. Paul Mason. PM pg. 41

Psalm 90: *Be with me, Lord, when I am in trouble.*  
Be With Me Lord. C. Alexander Peloquin/Joseph Gelineau SJ. CWB 203  
Be With Me, Lord. Paul Mason. PM pg. 64

Psalm 129: *With the Lord there is mercy and fullness of redemption.*  
With The Lord There Is Mercy. J. Robert Carroll/Joseph Gelineau SJ. CWB 204  
Psalm 130: With the Lord There Is Mercy. The Grail. GA 76  
Psalm 130: With the Lord There Is Mercy. The Grail. GA 77  
With the Lord There Is Mercy. Paul Mason. PM pg. 100  
Psalm 130 (129): Jenny O'Brien. JOBA pg. 36

## **Music selections by Michael Mangan**

Out of ashes (TT/SYJ) [Gathering, Distribution of Ashes]  
Create a new heart (FWS) *Based on Ps 50/51* [Gathering, Gifts, Recessional]  
Be merciful, O Lord (LCC) *Ps 50 (51)* Children's Lectionary Translation  
This is the time (TT) [Gathering, Recessional]  
Lenten acclamation (TT) [Gospel Acclamation]  
Lenten gospel acclamation – Mass Jubilee (MJC) [Gospel Acclamation]  
Turn back to God (TT/SYJ) [CHILDREN: Gathering, Recessional]