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## Ash Wednesday - 14 February 2024

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# 14 February 2024

## Ash Wednesday

Reflection by Andrew Doohan

### Introduction

Today's celebration of Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of the Season of Lent, a time to repair and restore our relationship with God.

**The Penitential Act is replaced by the distribution of ashes.**

### First Reading

**Joel 2:12-18**

Like all the prophets, the call of the Prophet Joel is to turn back to the Lord your God, to seek and rely on God's graciousness.

### Responsorial Psalm

**Psalm 50(51):3-6, 12-14, 17**

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

The psalmist reminds us of God's unbounded mercy, which allows us to call upon God for help in living life with God. In light of our other readings, our psalm calls us always to seek God's help in overcoming obstacles to being in right relationship with God.

### Second Reading

**2 Corinthians 5:20 – 6:2**

As we listen to Paul speak to the Corinthians, we are reminded to turn back to God because of what God has already done for us in the person of Jesus Christ.

### Gospel Reading

**Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18**

At the heart of the Season of Lent, our Gospel reading reminds us, is the focus on right relationship with God rather than human admiration.

## Reflection

One of the phenomena associated with the rise of social media over the years has particular relevance for the occasion of Ash Wednesday. I speak of 'the selfie', those ubiquitous photos of individuals that are taken in all sorts of places and then posted to the individual's own social media feeds.

A not-so-recent form of the 'selfie' appears on or around Ash Wednesday yearly on Catholic social media feeds. Catholic individuals proudly photograph their foreheads adorned with ashes and then promptly push that photograph out across the internet. What follows is lots of 'likes', positive comments about what the individual has done, and, occasionally, some critique of the skill of the one who had applied the ashes. It's all fairly standard stuff in the social media world.

Yet I cannot help but wonder if the individuals who engage in this practice 'have had their reward'.

Don't get me wrong. Having ashes on your forehead is a compelling form of witnessing in our contemporary secular world and can provoke many good conversations with those who ask about them. Yet still, I wonder if posting a 'selfie' of yourself wearing ashes, with all the associated follow-on that goes with social media use, just doesn't quite hit the right tone.

Today's Gospel reading, heard every year on Ash Wednesday, makes it clear that the purpose of engaging in penitential practices – prayer, fasting, and works of charity – is not to win the admiration of our fellow humans but rather about refocussing our attention to our relationship with God, the One 'who sees all that is done in secret'. A misplaced focus can seriously undermine what we are called to be about during the Season of Lent.

Our second reading today clarifies the purpose of the Season of Lent. 'Be reconciled to God', Paul tells the Church of Corinth. 'Now is the favourable time', he says. And so it is. This Season of Lent is the perfect time each year for believers to reestablish our relationship with God, to refocus our attention on God's action in human history, and, with God's merciful help, to jettison those things that impede God's call on our lives.

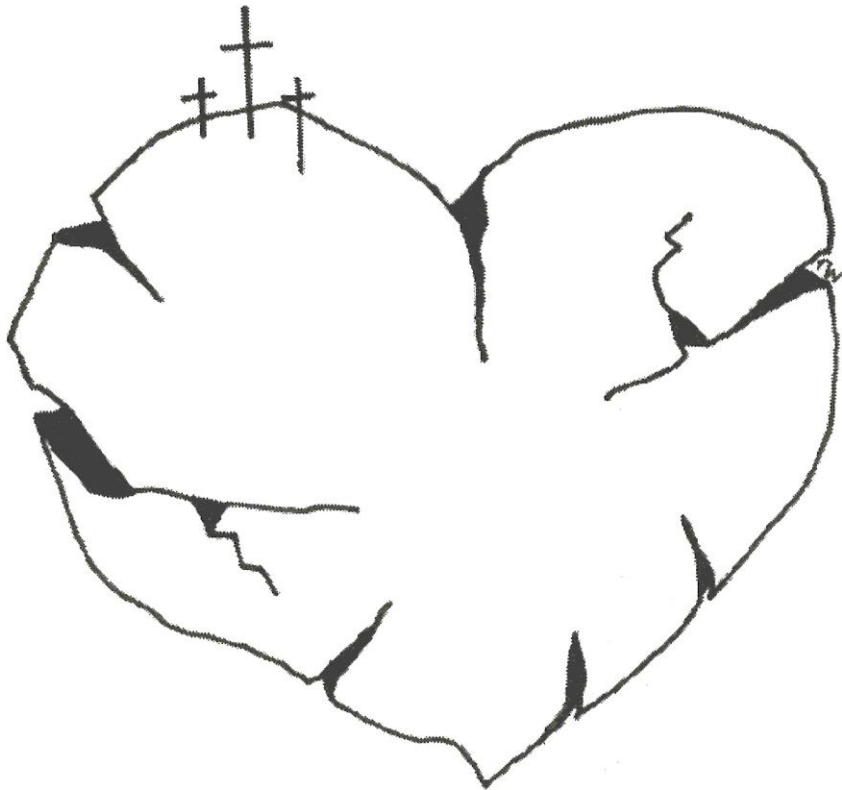
The prophet Joel encapsulates the whole purpose of the Season of Lent well in the opening lines of today's first reading: "Now, now – it is the Lord who speaks – come back to me with all your heart, fasting, weeping, mourning'. Let your hearts be broken not your garments torn, turn to the Lord your God again, for he is all tenderness and compassion, slow to anger, rich in graciousness, and ready to relent.'

For Christian believers, the call to do this comes because of what God has already done for us in sending the Only Begotten to live among us and, for our sake, to suffer, to die, and to rise again for us, a gift we will celebrate fully at Easter. The celebration of Easter, however, is still weeks away, and our preparation for the great solemnities, for the great 'day of salvation', is now during Lent.

Embracing the true nature of the Season of Lent can be a challenging undertaking in our contemporary society since it requires us to recognise that human beings are not

perfect and are indeed fallible. It also requires us to recognise that we cannot hope to succeed in what Lent calls us to if we 'neglect the grace of God that [we] have received' nor think that we can achieve 'success' simply via our own efforts. Today's psalm reminds us that God, in God's unlimited mercy, cleanses, washes, sustains, and restores us once again so we can sing God's praises.

May this Season of Lent be a time of renewal for us all.



**Come back to me  
with all your  
heart.**

# Prayer of the Faithful

## Introduction

People of God, as we gather to celebrate God's mercy on Ash Wednesday, let us pray for all our needs, the needs of the Church and the wider world.

## Petitions

We pray for the leaders of our Church, especially Pope Francis. As he continues to lead us all on a synodal journey, may he be strengthened in health and fortitude. May all other leaders be drawn into the synodal way so that we all come to a deeper relationship to God.

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

We pray for the political and economic leaders of our world. May they recognise that peace is the greatest gift to the true prosperity for the peoples of the world.

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

We pray for all providers of education for all age groups. May they begin the new academic year with the sincere purpose of bringing the best out of each human endeavour so that their potential may be reached.

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

We pray for our community gathered here receiving the ashes to remind us of our frailness and need for renewal of our relationship with God.

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

We pray for all those who are suffering throughout the world due violent conflict. May they find peace and security through the efforts of those who work to bring justice. May we as a community contribute wherever possible to the work of social justice.

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

We pray for those in our community who have died, who grieve, or who are suffering ill health in body and mind. May the compassionate hands of those who care for them bring them peace, healing and strength.

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

## Conclusion

God of compassion, evidence of your love astounds us and so we faithfully bring all our needs to you knowing that they will be answered through the power of the Spirit and in the name of Jesus, our Lord.

**Amen.**

## Music selections by Alessio Loiacono and Chris deSilva

Title	AOV1	AOV2	AOVK	CWB	CWBII	GA
Again we keep this solemn fast					285	
Ashes		16				209
Be reconciled as one	162					
Bring us back to you, O Lord our God				629	287	
Create in me				664		
Create in me a clean heart, O God					478	40
Forgive our sins				680	120	
Forty days and forty nights					288	
From ashes to the living font					289	
God of mercy and compassion				692	290	302
Grant to us, O Lord				698	291	303
Great God of Mercy					126	
Hear us, almighty Lord ( <i>Attende Domine</i> )					292	
Hosea	30			715		213
Lord Jesus, as we turn from sin				735	294	
May this Lenten discipline				746	295	
O Father, I know I can count on your mercy				762	122	
O God, creator of us all				764		
O Sun of Justice					178/179	2
Our Father, we have wandered				784		
Return to God					298	304
Spare your people, Lord/ <i>Parce Domine</i>					299	
The glory of these forty days				825	301	
We want to live like you, Jesus			32			
<b>Title</b>	<b>S&amp;S1</b>			<b>S&amp;S2</b>		
Be merciful, O Lord (Angrisano)	66					
Be merciful, O Lord (Thomas)				257		
Create a clean heart				302		
40 Days.				310		

## Psalms Selected by Chris deSilva and Angela McCarthy

Psalm 50: *Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.*

	CWB	GA	JOBA	LPSF	PM1
Psalm 50	202	41	pg. 28	pg. 20	pg. 44 or 41 new ed.

## 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, Gifts, Recessional]

**Lenten acclamation** (TT) [Gospel Acclamation]

**Lenten gospel acclamation – Mass Jubilee** (MJC) [Gospel Acclamation]

**Turn back to God** (TT/SYJ) [CHILDREN: Gathering, Recessional]