

Ash Wednesday Service

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

Lord, bless us as we gather to mark the beginning of the season of Lent. We know that you call us to overcome our selfishness, to trust always in your goodness and to reach out to others with compassion. During this holy time may we rediscover the value of prayer, and the importance of caring for others. Teach us by the example of your Son who spent forty days in the wilderness that we need to take time to be with you and to rediscover the things that really matter. We make this prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen

Scripture Reading

A Reading based on the Prophet Isaiah (58:1-9)

(This reading offers a very important lesson on the kind of religious faith that God is interested in. It begins with the people complaining to God that even though they do their religious practices God does not pay any heed to them. God then answers them by telling them he is only interested in their prayers when they are matched by actions that show their concern for others.)

Reader 1:

The People cry out: "Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why do we humble ourselves, but you do not notice?"

Reader 2:

God replies: "Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day, and oppress all your workers. You fast only to quarrel and to fight and to strike with a wicked fist. Fasting like this will not make your voice heard in heaven.

Is this the kind of religion I am interested in? Do you think I am convinced by you bowing down your heads, and lying in sackcloth and ashes? Will you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD?

Reader 3:

No, this is the kind of fasting that I choose: loose the bonds of injustice, undo the chains of oppression, lift up those who are suffering. Share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, cover them, and do not hide yourselves from those in need.

Reader 4

When you live like this then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your redeemer shall go before you, the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am. If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom will be like the noonday.

The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places. He will make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail.

The Word of the Lord

Reflection

The season of Lent begins with Ash Wednesday. On TV, radio and billboards nationwide we have seen and heard the Trocaire Lenten Campaign promoting the idea: "Give it up for Trocaire". The catchy phrase and the famous people involved are inviting us to think about what we might give up for a day in order to benefit the great work done by Trocaire among the poorest people in the world. Hopefully this campaign will be very successful financially but hopefully it will also offer us an opportunity to reflect on the season of Lent and the very positive role it can play in helping us to be better, more reflective and more caring people. This is always easier when we undertake it as part of a group and so in school we can offer each other great support in making the best possible use of this season.

We begin the season with the distribution of ashes. This simple ritual marks the beginning of Lent as a time of renewal – a time to take stock of where we are and an opportunity to make changes. Jesus began his public life asking people to do just one thing. Our Bibles usually translate it as "repent" but behind this word lies the idea of changing your world view – learning to see things differently. In asking us to do this Jesus was like the great prophets that went before him but there is one key difference. Jesus as the Son of God not only asks it of us, he also makes it possible – he empowers us through the gift of the Spirit. So during Lent we want to make ourselves available to this gift – the gift of seeing the world as God sees it and loving as God loves.

When we take the ashes on Ash Wednesday it is a way of saying publicly that we know our need of God and that we want to live well in the world. Let's do that together by prayer and by a promise to make one simple change in our life that will be of benefit to those around us.

The Blessing and Distribution of the Ashes

Dear friends let us ask our Father to bless these ashes which we will use as the sign of our repentance.

Lord bless these ashes by which we show our need of you. Forgive our sins and keep us faithful to the promises we make for the season of Lent.

(The ashes are sprinkled with holy water)

The ashes are distributed on those who come forward with the words:

Turn away from sin and be faithful to the gospel.

During the distribution of the ashes a suitable hymn may be sung or instrumental music played.

Concluding Prayer

Lord bless those who will search for you this Lent

(Response) Lord have mercy

Lord bless those who suffer injustice and those who defend them

Lord have mercy

Lord bless those who suffer from addiction and those who support them

Lord have mercy

Lord bless those who are homeless and those who shelter them

Lord have mercy

Lord bless those who are hungry and those who feed them

Lord have mercy

Lord bless those who are sick and those who care for them

Lord have mercy

Lord bless those who work for peace

Lord have mercy

Lord bless everyone in our school community

Lord have mercy

Father in heaven during this Lent help us to be a support to one another and to come to a greater understanding of your care for each one of us so that when we come to celebrate Easter our faith may be strong and our love sincere. We ask this through Christ our Lord.