

Ash Wednesday Prayer and Reflection 2021

Acknowledgment of First Nations Peoples

We acknowledge the living culture of the First Nations people of the land, seas and waterways on which we gather; the traditional custodians of the land, seas and waterways on which we gather. These people have lived for millennia, and continue to live, in deep spiritual connection to the land, seas, skies, waterways and all things nurtured by mother earth. God of all wonder, bless the land on which we now stand. Bless this time, eternally now. Bless those who gather, open to your presence. May we walk with the wisdom of our elders guiding our way.

Prayer

Loving God, who led Jesus into the desert to fast and pray, lead us into deserts where we too can fast and pray; reflect and give generously.

Give us the courage to scrutinise our hearts with honesty; give us strength to deal with what we find; give us love to forgive ourselves and each other, so that, in peace and joy, we may celebrate at Easter the death and resurrection of Jesus. We make this prayer through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**



Figure 1 'Christ in the Wilderness', 1898, by [Briton Riviere](#)

Responsorial Psalm

If you are praying with others, sit in choir (opposite each other to respond in chorus), alternatively, slowly read the psalm, allowing the words to move from one side of the room to the other, filling the space with your call to our God.

We call on our loving God for mercy and a clean heart.

All:	Be merciful O Lord for we have sinned
Right hand side:	Have mercy on us, God, in your kindness. In your compassion forgive us our sins.
Left hand side:	Wash away our guilt and cleanse us from our sins.
Right hand side:	A pure heart create for us, put a steadfast spirit within us.
Left hand side:	Do not cast us away from you, nor deprive us of your Holy Spirit.
Right hand side:	Give us again the joy of your help; with a spirit of fervour sustain us.
Left hand side:	Lord, open our lips and our voice shall declare your praise
All:	Be merciful O Lord for we have sinned

Ash Wednesday – A reflection by Rachel McLean, Leader Formation, on “The art of less.”

The beginning of the academic year often feels like a sprint along Cape Tribulation beach, rather than a meander through the Daintree. The busyness of setting up routines, establishing norms, reflecting on and refining curriculum and most importantly, getting to know your students takes time. And sometimes, it feels as if there simply isn't enough time to go around. This is one of the reasons that I welcome an early Ash Wednesday and commencement of Lent. It is an invitation to lean into the wisdom and ways of Jesus and slow down, take stock, reflect and re-examine our relationships with others and with God. The 40 days of Lent, a nod to the 40 days Jesus spent in the desert before beginning his public ministry, invites us to slow down, to think deeply and listen to the murmurings of our hearts.



Figure 2 Holy Land Desert Walking, R McLean personal photo 2016

I have had the privilege of walking in deserts in Australia, Africa and the Holy Land, and you have no choice but to slow down and really tune into your body, mind and soul. In the desert, you don't yearn for WiFi to facilitate your online shopping, you don't hunger for Fast Food and you don't need to factor in time to finish binge watching your latest TV fascination. In the desert, you make do with less. When we make do with less, we avail ourselves and our resources to those who have less. This is the premise on which Project Compassion bases its annual call for support and advocacy. The 2021 theme, *Be More*, invites us to do just that, be more rather than have more; to give more rather than acquire more. Covid-19 continues to have a devastating impact on our world; the poor are getting poorer, and the isolated lonelier. Agencies like Caritas Australia not only partner with those living and ministering on the edges of our society, they also help those caught in our cycle of wanting more through advocacy and awareness raising programs. I invite you to check them out [here](#); and, if you are a teacher, consider signing up for a Virtual Immersion which is outlined later in the Bulletin.

On Ash Wednesday, please remember the millions of Catholics around the world who are unable to join as a community to mark the first day of Lent. While we are able to gather as a community, we too will mark Ash Wednesday in a new way, a way that connects us back to the early Christian communities where those who have sinned removed themselves from society and covered themselves in ashes as a form of penitence. This year, all Catholics all around the world will receive a light sprinkling of ashes on the top of our head. I am grateful that our understanding of sin, repentance and forgiveness has changed and I no longer need to wear sackcloth and ashes to show my community when I have failed to be the best person I can be. At the same time, I am yearning for the invitation to wander in the desert to reflect, pray, fast and give generously. How will you mark Lent this year?

Concluding Prayer

Let us Pray,

Gracious God help us to be:

A people of hope;

A people of compassion;

A people of love.

Encourage us on our journey from our head to our heart.

May our actions today, and in the 40 days that follow,
be generous and prayer-filled.

Steady us when we wavier;

hold us when we hurt;

help us when we fail to forgive.

We ask these prayers and those we hold in the depth of our souls,
in the name of Jesus, our companion on our journey. Amen



Figure 3 Jay Scott: [Abstract](#)

Action

- Explore reflections and activities for young people written by [Larry Broding](#)
- Learn more about the history and custom of Ash Wednesday: "Four things to know about Ash Wednesday," William Johnston, The Conversation, 26 February 2020, <https://theconversation.com/4-things-to-know-about-ash-wednesday-112120>
- Listen to "[Head to the Heart](#)" by Will Reagan, Brock Human, Andrea Marie Reagan, Michael Ketterer. As you listen, hold your immediate and global community in prayer; asking for courage and strength as they enter the journey of transformation this Lent.