

Ash Wednesday - February 22 2023

Acknowledgment of Land, Seas, Skies and Waterways

We acknowledge the First Nations peoples as the first inhabitants of the nation and the traditional custodians of the lands where we live, learn and work. We pay our respect to the Elders past, present, and emerging, for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture and hopes of First Nations peoples across the nation. We acknowledge the deep spiritual attachment and relationship of First Nations peoples to this country and commit ourselves to the ongoing journey of Reconciliation.

Context- Ash Wednesday

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent: 40 days of fasting, prayer and almsgiving as we journey with Jesus in the desert. Many of us can correctly state that our Lenten sacrifices begin on Ash Wednesday and that we will receive ashes on our foreheads, but these are not the main features of the season of Lent. On Ash Wednesday, we hear from the Prophet Joel who tells us

'Rend your hearts and not your garments.'

In his homily from the Blessing and Imposition of the Ashes in 2014, Pope Francis reminded the faithful that

'these penetrating words of the Prophet Joel...[point] to conversion of heart as the chief characteristic of this season of grace.'

Let us not forget that ashes and Lenten sacrifices are not the epitome of the season, but prepare ourselves to open our hearts to conversion as we journey in the desert with Jesus.

Scripture: Responsorial Psalm 51

Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.

Have mercy on me, O God, in your goodness;
in the greatness of your compassion wipe out my offence.
Thoroughly wash me from my guilt and of my sin cleanse me.

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

For I acknowledge my offence,
and my sin is before me always:
"Against you only have I sinned,
and done what is evil in your sight."

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

A clean heart create for me, O God,
and a steadfast spirit renew within me.
Cast me not out from your presence,
and your Holy Spirit take not from me.

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

Give me back the joy of your salvation,
and a willing spirit sustain in me.
O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall proclaim your praise.

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

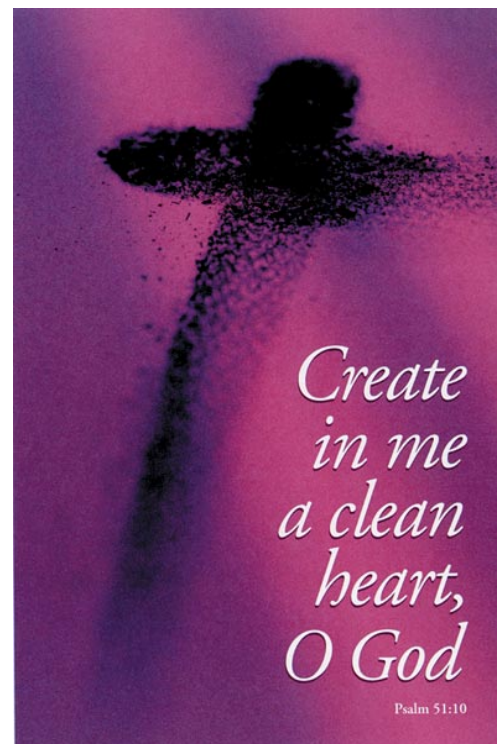


Figure 1 Source: Augsburg Fortress

Reflection by Kirby Will Project Officer Identity and Outreach.

Over the years, I have collected quite a number of written reflections for the season of Lent and in my collection I have a wonderful book called *Lent with Saint Teresa of Calcutta* written by Heidi Hess Saxton. In her reflection for Ash Wednesday, Heidi talks of the example Mother Teresa gave us concerning love and how it can be applied to Ash Wednesday and Lent. She says

*'we are reminded over and over again that love does the hard thing, the distasteful thing.
Love is not afraid of a little inconvenience or embarrassment.'*

There are several things about the Lenten season that calls on our love for God and Jesus to do the hard thing. Displaying our ashes on our foreheads as we go about our day may seem embarrassing but love is not afraid of embarrassment. Making a sacrifice for the duration of Lent can be inconvenient to us but love is not afraid of inconvenience. Opening our hearts for conversion is a hard thing but let us do it anyway. Our God is a loving God who rejoices in our taking up of the opportunity to begin again with clean hearts each Lent. May we be prepared to do the hard things of love as we enter once again into the pilgrimage of penitence to ready ourselves for the joy that awaits us in the Easter season.

Prayer

Spirit of God, who led Jesus into the desert to fast and pray,
Lead us as we enter this time of Lent.

Give us 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

And all that it means for each of us.

We make this prayer through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

(Accessed from [Brisbane Catholic Education Ash Wednesday Prayers](#) – accessed 15 February 2023)

Call to Action:

- Watch Matt Maher's [Ash Wednesday Breathing Through Lent](#) reflection.
- As a family choose some activities for Lent from this [list](#) that you could do together throughout the 40 days.
- Listen to Matt Maher's song based on Psalm 51: [Clean Heart](#)



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