

Ash Wednesday at Home 2021

Diocese of San Angelo

While the winter storm makes it very difficult to gather in our churches this Ash Wednesday, it is helpful to spend some time this day, either with others or alone, in prayerful reflection on the beginning of this holy season of Lent.

It is recommended to have a crucifix or cross and a candle, which is lighted for this prayer time.

Begin with the Sign of the Cross.

Leader: The Lord calls us to these days of penance and mercy.
Blessed be the name of the Lord.

All: Now and forever.

Leader: Each year we keep these forty days with prayer and penance and the practice of charity, so that we may approach the celebration of Easter ready to renew the grace of our Baptism. Let us prayerfully reflect on the readings for Ash Wednesday from the liturgy of our Church.

First Reading

Joel 2:12-18

Even now, says the LORD, return to me with your whole heart,
with fasting, and weeping, and mourning;
Rend your hearts, not your garments, and return to the LORD, your God.
For gracious and merciful is he,
slow to anger, rich in kindness, and relenting in punishment.
Perhaps he will again relent and leave behind him a blessing,
Offerings and libations for the LORD, your God.
Blow the trumpet in Zion! proclaim a fast, call an assembly;
Gather the people, notify the congregation;
Assemble the elders, gather the children and the infants at the breast;
Let the bridegroom quit his room and the bride her chamber.
Between the porch and the altar
let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep,
And say, "Spare, O LORD, your people,
and make not your heritage a reproach, with the nations ruling over them!
Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where is their God?'"
Then the LORD was stirred to concern for his land
and took pity on his people.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 51:3-4, 5-6ab, 12-13, 14 and 17

R. 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 offense.
 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 offense,
 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.

Second Reading**2 Cor 5:20—6:2**

Brothers and sisters:

We are ambassadors for Christ,
 as if God were appealing through us.

We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

For our sake he made him to be sin who did not know sin,
 so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

Working together, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain.

For he says:

*In an acceptable time I heard you,
 and on the day of salvation I helped you.*

Behold, now is a very acceptable time;
 behold, now is the day of salvation.

Verse Before the Gospel

See Ps 95:8

If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

Gospel

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

Jesus said to his disciples:

“Take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them;
 otherwise, you will have no recompense from your heavenly Father.

When you give alms, do not blow a trumpet before you,
 as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets
 to win the praise of others.

Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward.

But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing,
 so that your almsgiving may be secret.

And your Father who sees in secret will repay you.

“When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites,
 who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners
 so that others may see them.

Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward.

But when you pray, go to your inner room,
 close the door, and pray to your Father in secret.

And your Father who sees in secret will repay you.

“When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites.

They neglect their appearance,
 so that they may appear to others to be fasting.

Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward.

But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face,
 so that you may not appear to be fasting, except to your Father who is hidden.

And your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you.”

Reflect on the readings, either in silence or through conversation.

Intercessions:

Offer prayers of intercession for the world, the Church, those in need, neighbors, family members, and personal needs. Remember especially those without water, without electricity, and without heat.

After the intercessions, the leader says:

Leader: Let us kneel and ask God's blessing on us and on this holy season.

After a short silence, the leader continues:

Leader: Merciful God, you called us forth from the dust of the earth; you claimed us for Christ in the waters of Baptism.
Look upon us as we enter this holy season of Lent, and help us to grow in faith, hope, and charity.
May our fasting lead us to hunger for righteousness;
May our works of charity make us more compassionate;
May our prayer bring us to deeper union with you.
All that we do is in the name of Jesus, for by his holy Cross he has redeemed the world, he who lives and reigns forever and ever.

All: Amen.

Kissing the Cross:

Each person then kisses the crucifix or cross. All then stand, and the leader continues:

Lord's Prayer:

Leader: Let us pray the words our Savior gave us:

All: Our Father...

Signing each other's foreheads:

Leader: Let us now sign one another with the Sign of the Cross.

**Each person signs the others with the Sign of the Cross.
Make the Sign of the Cross on each other's forehead, using these words:**

“Repent, and believe in the Gospel.”

Conclusion:

Leader: Let us bless the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

The outline of this service is partially based upon the book *Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers*, published by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Supplemental Reflection for Adults:

Message of the Holy Father Pope Francis for Lent 2021

***“Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem” (Mt 20:18).
Lent: A Time for Renewing Faith, Hope, and Love.***

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Jesus revealed to his disciples the deepest meaning of his mission when he told them of his passion, death and resurrection, in fulfilment of the Father’s will. He then called the disciples to share in this mission for the salvation of the world.

In our Lenten journey towards Easter, let us remember the One who “humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross” (*Phil 2:8*). During this season of conversion, let us renew our *faith*, draw from the “living water” of *hope*, and receive with open hearts the *love* of God, who makes us brothers and sisters in Christ. At the Easter vigil, we will renew our baptismal promises and experience rebirth as new men and women by the working of the Holy Spirit. This Lenten journey, like the entire pilgrimage of the Christian life, is even now illumined by the light of the resurrection, which inspires the thoughts, attitudes and decisions of the followers of Christ.

Fasting, prayer and almsgiving, as preached by Jesus (cf. *Mt 6:1-18*), enable and express our conversion. The path of poverty and self-denial (*fasting*), concern and loving care for the poor (*almsgiving*), and childlike dialogue with the Father (*prayer*) make it possible for us to live lives of sincere faith, living hope and effective charity.

1. Faith calls us to accept the truth and testify to it before God and all our brothers and sisters.

In this Lenten season, *accepting and living the truth revealed in Christ* means, first of all, opening our hearts to God’s word, which the Church passes on from generation to generation. This truth is not an abstract concept reserved for a chosen intelligent few. Instead, it is a message that all of us can receive and understand thanks to the wisdom of a heart open to the grandeur of God, who loves us even before we are aware of it. Christ himself is this truth. By taking on our humanity, even to its very limits, he has made himself the way – demanding, yet open to all – that leads to the fullness of life.

Fasting, experienced as a form of self-denial, helps those who undertake it in simplicity of heart to rediscover God’s gift and to recognize that, created in his image and likeness, we find our fulfilment in him. In embracing the experience of poverty, those who fast make themselves poor with the poor and accumulate the treasure of a love both received and shared. In this way, fasting helps us to love God and our neighbour, inasmuch as love, as Saint Thomas Aquinas teaches, is a movement outwards that focuses our attention on others and considers them as one with ourselves (cf. *Fratelli Tutti*, 93).

Lent is a time for believing, for welcoming God into our lives and allowing him to “make his dwelling” among us (cf. *Jn* 14:23). Fasting involves being freed from all that weighs us down – like consumerism or an excess of information, whether true or false – in order to open the doors of our hearts to the One who comes to us, poor in all things, yet “full of grace and truth” (*Jn* 1:14): the Son of God our Saviour.

2. Hope as “living water” enabling us to continue our journey.

The Samaritan woman at the well, whom Jesus asks for a drink, does not understand what he means when he says that he can offer her “living water” (*Jn* 4:10). Naturally, she thinks that he is referring to material water, but Jesus is speaking of the Holy Spirit whom he will give in abundance through the paschal mystery, bestowing a hope that does not disappoint. Jesus had already spoken of this hope when, in telling of his passion and death, he said that he would “be raised on the third day” (*Mt* 20:19). Jesus was speaking of the future opened up by the Father’s mercy. Hoping with him and because of him means believing that history does not end with our mistakes, our violence and injustice, or the sin that crucifies Love. It means receiving from his open heart the Father’s forgiveness.

In these times of trouble, when everything seems fragile and uncertain, it may appear challenging to speak of hope. Yet Lent is precisely the season of hope, when we turn back to God who patiently continues to care for his creation which we have often mistreated (cf. *Laudato Si’*, 32-33; 43-44). Saint Paul urges us to place our hope in reconciliation: “Be reconciled to God” (*2 Cor* 5:20). By receiving forgiveness in the sacrament that lies at the heart of our process of conversion, we in turn can spread forgiveness to others. Having received forgiveness ourselves, we can offer it through our willingness to enter into attentive dialogue with others and to give comfort to those experiencing sorrow and pain. God’s forgiveness, offered also through our words and actions, enables us to experience an Easter of fraternity.

In Lent, may we be increasingly concerned with “speaking words of comfort, strength, consolation and encouragement, and not words that demean, sadden, anger or show scorn” (*Fratelli Tutti*, 223). In order to give hope to others, it is sometimes enough simply to be kind, to be “willing to set everything else aside in order to show interest, to give the gift of a smile, to speak a word of encouragement, to listen amid general indifference” (*ibid.*, 224).

Through recollection and silent prayer, hope is given to us as inspiration and interior light, illuminating the challenges and choices we face in our mission. Hence the need to pray (cf. *Mt* 6:6) and, in secret, to encounter the Father of tender love.

To experience Lent in hope entails growing in the realization that, in Jesus Christ, we are witnesses of new times, in which God is “making all things new” (cf. *Rev* 21:1-6). It means receiving the hope of Christ, who gave his life on the cross and was raised by God on the third day, and always being “prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls [us] to account for the hope that is in [us]” (*1 Pet* 3:15).

3. Love, following in the footsteps of Christ, in concern and compassion for all, is the highest expression of our faith and hope.

Love rejoices in seeing others grow. Hence it suffers when others are anguished, lonely, sick, homeless, despised or in need. Love is a leap of the heart; it brings us out of ourselves and creates bonds of sharing and communion.

“‘Social love’ makes it possible to advance towards a civilization of love, to which all of us can feel called. With its impulse to universality, love is capable of building a new world. No mere sentiment, it is the best means of discovering effective paths of development for everyone” (*Fratelli Tutti*, 183).

Love is a gift that gives meaning to our lives. It enables us to view those in need as members of our own family, as friends, brothers or sisters. A small amount, if given with love, never ends, but becomes a source of life and happiness. Such was the case with the jar of meal and jug of oil of the widow of Zarephath, who offered a cake of bread to the prophet Elijah (cf. *1 Kings* 17:7-16); it was also the case with the loaves blessed, broken and given by Jesus to the disciples to distribute to the crowd (cf. *Mk* 6:30-44). Such is the case too with our almsgiving, whether small or large, when offered with joy and simplicity.

To experience Lent with love means caring for those who suffer or feel abandoned and fearful because of the Covid-19 pandemic. In these days of deep uncertainty about the future, let us keep in mind the Lord’s word to his Servant, “Fear not, for I have redeemed you” (*Is* 43:1). In our charity, may we speak words of reassurance and help others to realize that God loves them as sons and daughters.

“Only a gaze transformed by charity can enable the dignity of others to be recognized and, as a consequence, the poor to be acknowledged and valued in their dignity, respected in their identity and culture, and thus truly integrated into society” (*Fratelli Tutti*, 187).

Dear brothers and sisters, every moment of our lives is a time for believing, hoping and loving. The call to experience Lent as a journey of conversion, prayer and sharing of our goods, helps us – as communities and as individuals – to revive the faith that comes from the living Christ, the hope inspired by the breath of the Holy Spirit and the love flowing from the merciful heart of the Father.

May Mary, Mother of the Saviour, ever faithful at the foot of the cross and in the heart of the Church, sustain us with her loving presence. May the blessing of the risen Lord accompany all of us on our journey towards the light of Easter.

Pope Francis