

A Service for Ash Wednesday

Before entering the worship place the ministers light a fire and burn last year's palm crosses saying:

As a sign of our desire to put away our sin, we gather here to burn these palms from last year's celebration of Palm Sunday.

Living God,
in their life these palms drew life from the earth
and gave it to the animals they hosted and sheltered;
in the worship offered by our communities
they helped us offer festive joy:
Grant now, O God, that these palms, reduced to ashes,
may be for us a sign of your power
to purify our hearts.
May we recognize your love at work in us,
replanting our lives
in the sure and humble soil
of your truth and grace.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
One God, now and forever.
Amen.

On entry a minister says

O God, make speed to save us
All **O Lord, make haste to help us.**

Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear to my cry
All **Hold not your peace at my tears.**

The officiant welcomes the people.

Friends, welcome to our service for Ash Wednesday which is lead jointly by colleagues from the Longford 8 and South Dales Benefices. It is good to see the beginnings of new life around us; snowdrops and crocuses in the gardens, and the fields beginning to fill with new-born lambs. There are, also, signs that point towards a new life emerging from the pandemic; although still high, rates of new Covid 19 infections, hospitalizations, and deaths are declining. The efficient roll out of vaccines points towards a slow end to the current lockdown. All around are indications of better things to come.

Since early days Christians have celebrated Lent as a time of penitence and fasting. The deep purple tones of the Lenten season, with its themes of repentance, abstinence and humility, might seem to be the last thing we need right now. But, essentially, Lent is about light - lightening our load and re-prioritizing our lives. Lent is about being real. The words we hear as we begin the season of Lent might easily be taken as a signal of the bleak landscape that awaits us: "Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return." But recognizing our humble beginnings, the dust from which we come, we also hold on to the promise of the glory to which we move – which are both part of our human experience and God's plan for our renewal. Friends, I invite you, therefore, in the name of the Church, to the observance of a holy and hopeful Lent.

The Opening Canticle

Jesus, like a mother you gather your people to you;
you are gentle with us as a mother with her children.

Despair turns to hope through your sweet goodness;
through your gentleness we find comfort in fear.

Your warmth gives life to the dead,
your touch makes sinners righteous.

Lord Jesus, in your mercy heal us;
in your love and tenderness remake us.

In your compassion bring grace and forgiveness,
for the beauty of heaven may your love prepare us

St Anselm of Canterbury

Psalm 51.1-10

Refrain: The sacrifice of God is a broken spirit.

- ¹ Have mercy on me, O God, in your great goodness; ♦
according to the abundance of your compassion
blot out my offences.
- ² **Wash me thoroughly from my wickedness ♦
and cleanse me from my sin.**
- ³ For I acknowledge my faults ♦
and my sin is ever before me.
- ⁴ **Against you only have I sinned ♦
and done what is evil in your sight,**
- ⁵ So that you are justified in your sentence ♦
and righteous in your judgement.
- ⁶ **I have been wicked even from my birth, ♦
a sinner when my mother conceived me.**

- 7 Behold, you desire truth deep within me ♦
and shall make me understand wisdom
in the depths of my heart.
- 8 **Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean; ♦
wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.**
- 9 Make me hear of joy and gladness, ♦
that the bones you have broken may rejoice.
- 10 **Turn your face from my sins ♦
and blot out all my misdeeds.**

Refrain: The sacrifice of God is a broken spirit

**Glory to the Father, and to the Son,
And to the Holy Spirit:
As is was in the beginning is now,
And shall be forever Amen.**

The officiant prays after the Psalm

Take away, good Lord, the sin that corrupts us;
give us the sorrow that heals
and the joy that praises
and restore by grace your own image within us,
that we may take our place among your people;
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

A reading from the prophecy of Amos

Seek the Lord and live,
or he will sweep through the tribes of Joseph like a fire;
it will devour them,
and Bethel will have no one to quench it.
There are those who turn justice into bitterness
and cast righteousness to the ground.

He who made the Pleiades and Orion,
who turns midnight into dawn
and darkens day into night,
who calls for the waters of the sea
and pours them out over the face of the land —
the Lord is his name.

With a blinding flash he destroys the stronghold
and brings the fortified city to ruin.

There are those who hate the one who upholds justice in
court and detest the one who tells the truth.

You levy a straw tax on the poor
and impose a tax on their grain.

Therefore, though you have built stone mansions,
you will not live in them;
though you have planted lush vineyards,
you will not drink their wine.

For I know how many are your offences
and how great your sins.

There are those who oppress the innocent and take bribes
and deprive the poor of justice in the courts.

Therefore the prudent keep quiet in such times,
for the times are evil.

Seek good, not evil,
that you may live.

Then the Lord God Almighty will be with you,
just as you say he is.

Hate evil, love good;
maintain justice in the courts.

Perhaps the Lord God will have mercy
on the remnant of Joseph. (5:6-15)

This is the word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

Hymn

O for a closer walk with God *sung by St Martin's Voices*

O for a closer walk with God,
a calm and heavenly frame,
a light to shine upon the road
that leads me to the Lamb.

2 Return, O holy Dove! return,
sweet messenger of rest!
I hate the sins that made Thee mourn,
and drove Thee from my breast.

3 The dearest idol I have known,
whate'er that idol be,
help me to tear it from Thy throne,
and worship only Thee.

4 So shall my walk be close with God,
calm and serene my frame;
so purer light shall mark the road
that leads me to the Lamb.

William Cowper (1731-1800)

A reading from the gospel according to Matthew

Jesus said, 'When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites: they make their faces unsightly so that other people may see that they are fasting. I tell you this: they have their reward already. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that men may not see that you are fasting, but only your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees what is secret will give you your reward.'

'Do not store up for yourselves treasure on earth, where it grows rusty and moth-eaten, and thieves break in to steal it. Store up treasure in heaven, where there is no moth and no rust to spoil it, no thieves to break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.'

(6:16-21)

This is the word of the Lord
Thanks be to God.

The Homily

The Confession

Make our hearts clean, O God;
All and renew a right spirit within us.

The sacrifice of God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart God will not despise. Let us come to the Lord, who is full of compassion, and acknowledge our transgressions in penitence and faith.

Father eternal,
giver of light and grace,
we have sinned against you and against our neighbour,
in what we have thought,
in what we have said and done,
through ignorance, through weakness,
through our own deliberate fault.
We have wounded your love,
and marred your image in us.

We are sorry and ashamed,
and repent of all our sins.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
who died for us,
forgive us all that is past;
and lead us out from darkness
to walk as children of light.
Amen.

The officiant says God's words of forgiveness

May the Father forgive us
by the death of his Son
and strengthen us
to live in the power of the Spirit
all our days.
Amen

In penitence and faith let us make our prayer to the Father
and ask for his mercy and grace.

For your holy people,
that they may triumph over evil and grow in grace,
we pray to you, O Lord:
All **Lord, have mercy.**

For candidates for baptism and confirmation,
that they may live by every word that proceeds from your
mouth,
we pray to you, O Lord:
All **Lord, have mercy.**

For the leaders of the nations,
that you will guide them in the ways of mercy and truth,

we pray to you, O Lord:
All **Lord, have mercy.**

For the needy,
that they may not be forgotten,
nor the hope of the poor be taken away,
we pray to you, O Lord:
All **Lord, have mercy.**

For the sick in body, mind and spirit,
that they may know your power to heal,
we pray to you, O Lord:
All **Lord, have mercy.**

For the poor in spirit,
that they may inherit the kingdom of heaven
and see you face to face,
we pray to you, O Lord:
All **Lord, have mercy.**

Let us commend the world, for which Christ suffered,
to the mercy and protection of God,

God our Father,
the strength of all who put their trust in you,
mercifully accept our prayers;
and because, in our weakness,
we can do nothing good without you,
grant us the help of your grace,
that in keeping your commandments
we may please you, both in will and deed;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Trusting in the compassion of God let us pray to our heavenly Father;

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.**

Hymn

Guide me, O thou great Redeemer *sung by St Martin's Voices*

- 1 Guide me, O thou great Redeemer,
pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but thou art mighty,
hold me with thy powerful hand:
bread of heaven,
feed me now and evermore.
- 2 Open now the crystal fountain
whence the healing stream doth flow;
let the fiery, cloudy pillar
lead me all my journey through:
strong deliverer,
be thou still my strength and shield.

3 When I tread the verge of Jordan
 bid my anxious fears subside;
 death of death, and hell's destruction,
 land me safe on Canaan's side:
 songs of praises
 I will ever give to thee.

Arglwydd arwain drwy'r anialwch William Williams (1717-1791)
Translated by Peter Williams (1727-1796)

The officiant says words of blessing

God give you grace to grow in holiness,
to deny yourself, take up your cross and follow him:
And the blessing...