

LSC - ASH WEDNESDAY - February 18, 2026

Introduction

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of a 40 day journey of introspection and reflection as we journey with Jesus to the cross. We look within to honestly examine our hearts, our relationships with God, and with one another.

During Lent we are invited to turn our hearts more fully toward God.

Ash Wednesday helps us set our focus as we examine our lives and work, for habits that may distract us from our relationship with God.

We return, and turn, more fully toward Christ so that our hearts may be more aligned with God's heart.

As part of this evening's worship, the imposition of ashes will be offered.

Ashes have been used in Christian churches to mark the beginning of Lent since at least the 10th century. Ashes are mentioned in scripture as a symbol of purification and repentance. The ashes are offered as a reminder of our mortality and an assurance of God's forgiveness.

Call to Worship

Return to God with all your heart, mind, and soul.

We turn our hearts to you, O God.

Return to this season called Lent – a season reflection and introspection.

We turn our thoughts to you, O God.

Return to yourself, and to the treasure that is Christ living within you.

We turn our souls to you, O God.

Turning and returning, with heart, mind, and soul wide open, let us worship the God of love.

Opening Prayer

God, our Creator, **you have formed us out of the dust of earth. You are acting now in this world, for us and for all. This is a turbulent, hurting,**

promise-filled world that you call us to embrace: its people, its sorrows, its hope. In and through it all, you sustain us, you shape and feed us, you walk with us as companion. We come before you now to worship through our confession and lament. Amen

VU #374 Gathering Hymn *“Come and Find the Quiet Centre”*

1. **Come and find the quiet centre in the crowded life we lead,
find the room for hope to enter, find the frame where we are freed:
clear the chaos and the clutter, clear our eyes, that we can see
all the things that really matter, be at peace, and simply be.**

2. **Silence is a friend who claims us, cools the heat and slows the pace;
God it is who speaks and names us, knows our being, face to face,
making space within our thinking, lifting shades to show the sun,
raising courage when we're shrinking, finding scope for faith begun.**

3. **In the Spirit let us travel, open to each other's pain,
let our loves and fears unravel, celebrate the space we gain:
there's a place for deepest dreaming, there's a time for heart to care,
in the Spirit's lively scheming there is always room to spare!**

Prayer of the Day

Come, Holy Spirit, let us find our rest in you. As we begin this season of Lent, we step out of the fast-moving current of daily life. During this holy season, may we choose stillness over busy-ness; may we strive to listen rather than to speak. Help us slow our pace and quiet our minds, that our spirits may draw closer to you. Bless our worship with your presence, and fill our minds with new wisdom. Set the stage for joy in our lives; wait with us until it comes. Amen.

First Reading: Joel 2:12-14

In this Old Testament reading, the prophet Joel calls the people to a community lament because of the coming Day of the Lord. The repentant community reminds God of God's gracious character and asks God to spare the people, lest the nations doubt God's power to save.

A reading from the prophet Joel, the 2nd chapter:

But there's also this, it's not too late—God's personal message!—

“Come back to me and really mean it! Come fasting and weeping, sorry for your sins!” Change your life, not just your clothes.

Come back to God, *your* God.

And here's why: God is kind and merciful. God takes a deep breath, puts up with a lot, this most patient God, extravagant in love, always ready to cancel catastrophe. Who knows? Maybe God will do it now, maybe God will turn around and show pity. Maybe, when all is said and done, there will be blessings full and robust for your God! (MSG)

Word of God, word of life. **Thanks be to God.**

Psalm 51

Have mercy on me, God, according to your faithful love!

Wipe away my wrongdoings according to your great compassion!

Wash me completely clean of my guilt; purify me from my sin!

Because I know my wrongdoings, my sin is always right in front of me.

I've sinned against you—you alone. I've committed evil in your sight.

**That's why you are justified when you render your verdict,
completely correct when you issue your judgment.**

Yes, I was born in guilt, in sin, from the moment my mother conceived me.

**And yes, you want truth in the most hidden places;
you teach me wisdom in the most secret space.**

Purify me with hyssop and I will be clean;

wash me and I will be whiter than snow.

Let me hear joy and celebration again;

let the bones you crushed rejoice once more.

Hide your face from my sins; wipe away all my guilty deeds!

Create a clean heart for me, God; put a new, faithful spirit deep inside me!

Please don't throw me out of your presence;

please don't take your holy spirit away from me.

Return the joy of your salvation to me and sustain me with a willing spirit.

Then I will teach wrongdoers your ways, and sinners will come back to you.

Deliver me from violence, God, God of my salvation,

so that my tongue can sing of your righteousness.

Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will proclaim your praise. (CEB)

Gospel Reading: Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

In the gospel reading from Mathew, we hear Jesus commending almsgiving, prayer, and fasting, but Jesus also emphasizes that spiritual devotion must not be done for show.

The holy gospel according to Matthew, the 6th chapter. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

“Be careful that you don't practice your religion in front of people to draw their attention. If you do, you will have no reward from God who is in heaven. “Whenever you give to the poor, don't blow your trumpet as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets so that they may get praise from people. I assure you, that's the only reward they'll get. But when you give to the poor, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing so that you may give to the poor in secret. God who sees what you do in secret will reward you.

“When you pray, don't be like hypocrites. They love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners so that people will see them. I assure you, that's the only reward they'll get. But when you pray, go to your room, shut the door, and pray to God who is present in that secret place. God who sees what you do in secret will reward you.

And when you fast, don't put on a sad face like the hypocrites.

They distort their faces so people will know they are fasting.
 I assure you that they have their reward. When you fast, brush your hair
 and wash your face. Then you won't look like you are fasting to people,
 but only to God who is present in that secret place.
 God who sees in secret will reward you.

“Stop collecting treasures for your own benefit on earth,
 where moth and rust eat them and where thieves break in and steal
 them. Instead, collect treasures for yourselves in heaven,
 where moth and rust don't eat them and where thieves don't break in and
 steal them. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

The gospel of our Lord. **Praise to you, O Christ.**

Sermon

VU #400 Hymn of the Day **“Lord Listen to Your Children Praying”** (or ELWB #752)

**Lord, listen to your children praying, Lord, send your Spirit in this place;
 Lord, listen to your children praying,
 send us love, send us pow'r, send us grace. (2x)**

Responsive Confession and Forgiveness - *Create in Me a Clean Heart*¹

Create in us a clean heart, **open and receptive, so that we may embrace
 the many ways you choose to visit our lives.**

Create in us a clean heart, **purified through the daily disruptions
 and the life encounters that take us beyond our grasping control
 and ego-centredness.**

Create in us a clean heart, **freed from the clutter of enticements,
 so that we can enjoy the beauty of life's simple things and relish the gifts
 we easily take for granted.**

Create in us a clean heart, **bathed from harsh thoughts, shame,
 and perfectionistic tendencies, warmly welcoming others
 with the embrace of nonjudgment.**

¹ *Out of the Ordinary*, p.115, Joyce Rupp. Ava Maria Press. Used with permission.

Create in us a clean heart, **brushed free from frantic busyness, so that we will have time to dwell with you in the listening space of solitude and silence.**

Create in us a clean heart, **rinsed of the residue of false messages about our identity, enabling our inner goodness and light to shine through all we are and do.**

Create in us a clean heart, **cleansed of anxiety and lack of trust, restoring in us an enduring faith in your abiding presence and unconditional love.**

Create in us a clean heart, **scrubbed of racism and prejudice, drawing us toward all as our sisters and brothers and siblings.**

Create in us a clean heart, **washed with your mercy and strengthened by your love, helping us move beyond whatever keeps us from union with you.**

Prayer for Ash Wednesday

We pray:

O Source of life and love,

torn by desires to sit back and to enjoy the beauty of the world -- to savor the blue skies and gentle days –

and by desires to recast the world and to fight its evils –

to save the world...Torn by all those things that hurt and confuse and make no sense amid beauty -

yet supported by all those things that heal and hold us -

smiles, kisses, mountain vistas and gentle waves, warm words...

We live in mystery.

We live torn apart at times: so much glory, so much pain.

We live in faith: faith in ourselves and each other,

faith that we can create bonds of the spirit

that proclaim we are not alone.

We have much health within us;

we can live through the heartache to new life.

**So, for the grace of the world and all the tumble, too,
this day we give thanks... (BSouthworth)**

(Silence)

The Letting Go

We lay down what is past...

We lay down what is past and look to the future.

We take into our daily life signs of hope and healing.

**We reach beyond ourselves to share the lives of others
and touch a wider world.**

Blessing of the Ashes

May these ashes be blessed.

May they be for us a symbol of our return to the earth.

May we be blessed.

May we be earthed in your everlasting love,

as forgiven and forgiving people.

Imposition of Ashes

Return to God with your whole heart, trusting in God's love and compassion. Receive the gift of blessing, as you receive the ashes that remind us of our many needs— the need to return to God, the need to refocus our hearts and lives, the need to receive forgiveness, and the need to offer forgiveness. We come, trusting that God knows our every need.

The ministers will apply ashes to the forehead of each person.

Hymns sung during the Imposition of Ashes:

VU #411 "O God, We Call" (or All Creation Sings #1075)

O God we call, O God we call,

From deep inside we yearn, from deep inside we yearn

From deep inside we yearn for you. (Repeat)

VU #148 “Jesus Remember Me” (or ELWB #616)

Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. (repeat)

Prayer

Merciful God, accompany our journey through these 40 days.

Renew us in the gift of baptism, that we may provide for those in need, fast from self-indulgence, and above all that we may find our treasure and our joy in the life of Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

ELWB #325 Sending Hymn “I Want Jesus to Walk with Me”

- 1. I want Jesus to walk with me; I want Jesus to walk with me;
all along my pilgrim journey, Lord, I want Jesus to walk with me.**
- 2. In my trials, Lord, walk with me; in my trials, Lord, walk with me;
when my heart is almost breaking, Lord, I want Jesus to walk with me.**
- 3. When I’m in trouble, Lord, walk with me;
when I’m in trouble, Lord, walk with me;
when my head is bowed in sorrow, Lord, I want Jesus to walk with me.**

Blessing

Return to God with all your hearts.

Turn to your neighbors with the compassion of Christ.

May the God who makes all things new,

restore within you a spirit of joy and hope as you go forth this day. Amen.