

Ash Wednesday Service 6.30pm



The Ash Wednesday service is a service of confession before the Lord. Ashes and sackcloth were traditionally the signs of penitence among the people of God. As Lent begins, the season which emphasises the cross which Christ bore, taking away our sin – the wages of which are death, it is fitting to prepare our hearts for the great gift of salvation with the confession that we need a Saviour. Today ashes, given with the words, “dust you are, and unto dust you will return” are a reminder that our inheritance from Adam is the grave. Only in Christ do we have the hope of sin’s forgiveness and newness of life in the resurrection. Please take the quiet time before the service to prepare for the act of confession.

RITE OF INDIVIDUAL CONFESSION

Responsive Psalm 51: 1-17 (Red Psalters)

Prayer of Approach: Gracious God, we are not good at confession. Against you, you only have we sinned, yet we measure our sins against others, and so we absolve ourselves far too easily. We feel the self-consciousness of role play as we take upon ourselves the posture of the penitent. Father, if we are to come before you with open hands, with sincere sorrow for our sins, with true insight into our need for grace, with genuine humility you will need to help us. Give us your spirit – the spirit of conviction and the spirit of peace, testifying together with our spirit– as we turn toward you this evening, the only God to whom we can turn. In Christ our Lord, AMEN.

Hymn: # 192 “The Glory of these Forty Days” vv. 1, 4 & 5

Litany of confession based on the Ten Commandments:

All: “God spoke and these were His words: ‘I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me.’”

One: Father we confess the many things in our lives we place before you, and our basic sickness which is to regard ourselves before either you or our neighbour.

Response by all: “Lord have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this, your first commandment.” (Pause)

All: “You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. ⁵You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the **Lord** your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, ⁶but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.”

One: Father we confess our idols and we take this opportunity to lay them down. We have so often mistaken material things – things we can control and possess -- for you who are free and altogether your own. These things have displaced you, for we have given our energy and our love to them. Forgive us, even in our religiosity, for seeking to bring you into a form we can control and manage.

Response by all: “Lord have mercy upon us and incline our hearts to keep this, your second commandment.” (Pause)

All: “⁷You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the **Lord** your God, for the **Lord** will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.”

One: Father, forgive us when we associate your name with things that are not worthy of you, when we sanctify our own aims and ideas by representing them to ourselves and others in a way that seems sanctioned by heaven. Forgive us when we use your name carelessly, or to exert control over other people.

Response by all: “Lord have mercy upon us and incline our hearts to keep this, your third commandment” (Pause).

All: “⁸Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. ⁹Six days you shall labor and do all your work. ¹⁰But the seventh day is a sabbath to the **Lord** your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. ¹¹For in six days the **Lord** made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them,

but rested the seventh day; therefore the **Lord** blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.”

One: Father forgive us for our use of time, for the great tracts of time we waste in vanities and for the way we begrudge you our full attention, one day in seven.

Response by all: “Lord have mercy upon us and incline our hearts to keep this, your fourth commandment” (Pause).

All: “¹²Honour your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the **Lord** your God is giving you.”

One: Father forgive us for the ungenerous, petty ways we behave toward those who gave us life and nurture. Where these relationships are difficult, Lord, where there are unchangeable now because of death, release us from any regret and save us from doing things we would have cause to regret.

Response by all: “Lord have mercy upon us and incline our hearts to keep this, your fifth commandment (Pause).

All: “¹³You shall not murder.”

One: Father forgive that primitive violence which rises in us toward one another. Keep us from the consequences of our anger and help us to respect and love all life as we love our own.

Response by all: “Lord have mercy upon us and incline our hearts to keep this, your sixth commandment” (Pause).

All: “¹⁴You shall not commit adultery.”

One: Father, cause us to be contented. We confess that so often we neglect the good things that have been given us and focus on what others have, or the things that have been denied. In our sexual commitments as in our commitment to you, the one Lord, help us be people with an undivided heart.

Response by all: “Lord have mercy upon us and incline our hearts to keep this, your seventh commandment” (Pause).

All: “¹⁵You shall not steal.”

One: Father we confess that we are tempted to take what is not given and what is not ours. We confess here our extravagant way of living which steals from the earth and from future generations. Help us again Lord to be contented.

Response by all: “Lord have mercy upon us and incline our hearts to keep this, your eighth commandment” (Pause).

All: “¹⁶You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.”

One: Father, forgive us when we have taken away the good reputation of others. Forgive our love of gossip and our participation in it. Forgive us when in our speech, or in what we have omitted to say we have lied. Forgive us when we have believed the worst of someone rather than exercising the love which hopes all things.

Response by all: “Lord have mercy upon us and incline our hearts to keep this, your ninth commandment” (Pause).

All: “¹⁷You shall not covet your neighbour’s house; you shall not covet your neighbour’s wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour.”

One: Father, we pray that you would give us a grateful spirit. We confess that we have denied you the full measure of the gratitude we owe on account of what we still covet and want. Save us from bitterness. When we have been bitter on account of feeling shortchanged in relation to others, we now confess it.

Response by all: “Lord have mercy upon us and incline our hearts to keep this, your tenth commandment” (Pause).

All: Jesus said that *this is the first and the greatest commandment: ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; ³⁰you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ ³¹The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these” (Mk 12: 29-31)*

One: Father, Christ is our standard. He taught us how to love you without reserve and how to pour out a life in generosity to others. We confess that this feels far too extravagant to us. Forgive us for what we withhold both from others and from you.

Response by all: Write both these great laws in our hearts, Lord, we ask you (Pause).

All: On the night of his arrest Jesus said this to his disciples ¹⁵“If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14.15). Moreover he gave them one further thing to do: “³⁴I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

One: Father, we confess that we see the Christian life so often as a set of rules, a way of life, rather than a relationship with the God of love and a relationship with others in love. Father write these laws in our hearts so that we may keep them out of love, not out of fear or duty simply.

Response by all: Lord, help us to express our love for you by the keeping of your law. And perfect us, Lord, we pray, with love, one for another (Pause).

Silence for private confession

Psalm 115: 9-18 (Red Psalters)

Imposition of Ashes

Hymn: # 205 “O Love, How Deep, How Broad...” vv. 1, 2 and 3

GOD’S WORD PROCLAIMED

(Each year I offer a different Scripture reading and meditation based on it. The sermon for 2010 can be found separately in the sermon archive).

Scripture Reading:

Meditation:

Hymn: (Sometimes I have included an additional hymn here which goes with the theme of the meditation).

CORPORATE CONFESSION/INTERCESSION

*(Please note there will be no offering uplifted at this service. Plates stand at the door if you wish to give a retiring offering).

Litany of corporate confession based on the “seven deadly sins”

Refrain: hymn # 202 “*We Lay our Broken World...*”

Prayer by one: Lord, when the prophet Isaiah saw you in the temple, high and lifted up, he prayed “Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips, living in the midst of a people of unclean lips” (Isaiah 6.5). It is our belief too that “because we are sinful, the societies we live in are sinful” (Living Faith 2.5.6). We have confessed our private sin, but we live in the midst of a world which is sinful – in which there are principalities and powers that reign, which are not of your kingdom. Lord, we lay our broken world, in sorrow, at your feet, confessing

that while our citizenship is in heaven, yet in many ways this world suits us. We are complicit in its sin. We pray for its deliverance.

Refrain sung by all:

*“We lay our broken world, in sorrow at your feet,
haunted by hunger war, and fear, oppressed by power and hate.*

*Here human life seems less, than profit, might and pride,
though to unite us all in you, you lived and loved and died.”*

All: Lord, we confess that pride reigns in our world

One: Father we live in a culture where honour and shame still have great meaning, where to avoid shame and loss of face we will refuse to apologise, we will refuse to admit that we are wrong. Father forgive our pride. Forgive the silly things we take pride in – the size of our house, the make of our car. Forgive the way that pride prevents us from coming to you with an attitude of need for the salvation you offer.

All: Have mercy upon us (Pause).

All: Lord, we confess that greed reigns in our world

One: Father, our society is affluent and yet the drive in so many lives is merely to acquire more and more. Forgive us for the way that this greed is impacting our environment and forcing into debt and slavery the two thirds world. Father forgive our willing blindness to the implications of our lifestyle and our refusal to make the smallest sacrifices so that others may have life.

All: Have mercy upon us (Pause).

All: Lord, we confess that anger reigns in our world

One: Father the violence of our world terrifies and appalls us. We live in a world where alienated children turn guns on other children and teachers in the classroom and where fanatics rejoice at the thought of dashing the heads of an enemy nation’s children against the rocks. We live in a world where home is often a place of danger, where angry words and angry hands are raised. Father give us back decency and respect and grace.

All: Have mercy on us (Pause).

Refrain sung by all:

*“We bring our broken towns, our neighbours hurt and bruised;
you show us how old pain and wounds, for new life can be used.*

*We bring our broken loves, friends parted, families torn;
then in your life and death we see, that love must be reborn.”*

All: Lord, we confess that envy reigns in our world

One: Father, we have a world divided between the haves and the have nots, the beautiful people who are on the inner track and those outside who gnash their teeth at them, because they cannot gain admittance. Father help our world to celebrate the diversity of gifts as you teach us, and to be content with the gifts we have been given.

All: Have mercy upon us (Pause).

All: Lord, we confess that lust reigns in our world

One: Father, we cannot open a magazine or turn on the television without having our eyes affronted with what is the predominant idolatry of our day. The internet is a cesspool in which we mire even little children. Forgive us for the damage that is caused when we follow our lusts, for homes broken, for children raised with no other understanding of maturity than sexual maturity. In the course of idolizing sex we have defiled its sacramental nature, so that it cannot point to things beyond itself – to relationship, to trust, to life-long commitment and gracious acceptance. Father save us from the ways we pervert your good gifts and restore something of purity and modesty to this generation.

All: Have mercy upon us (Pause).

All: Lord, we confess that gluttony reigns in our world

One: Father we confess that our world’s relationship with food and drink is unhealthy and absurd. We ensure that in our supermarkets we have all the gourmet options, while others in our world, and even in our communities lack the means to feed their families nutritiously and with enough. For many Lord, it is impossible to drink without drinking to excess. And so we reap a whirlwind of carnage on the roads, and domestic violence and stupid, irresponsible things said and done. Father forgive a people whose god is their belly and help us to exercise some sanity and self-control.

All: Have mercy upon us (Pause).

All: Lord, we confess that sloth reigns in our world

One: Father, we live in a time when all the resources are at our disposal to fix world hunger, to find creative solutions to conflict instead of making war, to care for all the children of the world, to end the assault upon our environment, and the fact that we do not is an indictment of our sloth. We are a generation anesthetized by television, pouring our time and our money into vain things, rather than expending our energy in great endeavour. Do we not care, Lord? – surely we do; we just do not care *enough* to stir from our places of comfort. Father restore some energy and vision for doing good to our slothful generation.

All: Have mercy upon us (Pause).

Refrain sung by all:

*“We bring our broken selves, confused and closed and tired;
then through your gift of healing grace, new purpose is inspired.*

*O Spirit on us breathe, with life and strength anew;
find in us love and hope, and trust, and lift us up to you.”*

Prayer by one: Lord, we thank you that although we belong to this world with its trouble and its sin, yet you breathe your Spirit into us and transform us by your Word. As your desire for the world becomes our own, so we become what was always intended for us to be: a royal priesthood, shaping the world, interceding for it, offering it back to you, a sacrifice of thankfulness and praise. Lord, we will rejoice in and witness to your kingdom coming. We will pursue the ways of justice, love and of peace. We will not offer to you offerings that cost us nothing, we will pray in Jesus’ name: “Our Father...AMEN.

Hymn: # 211 *“Take up your cross’ the Saviour said”*

THE DISMISSAL INTO GOD’S WORLD

Charge and Benediction