

# Family Ritual for the Distribution of Ashes on Ash Wednesday

## *Book of Blessings 1656-1676*

*1656 The season of Lent begins with the ancient practice of marking the baptized with ashes as a public and communal sign of penance. The blessing and distribution of ashes on Ash Wednesday normally takes place during the celebration of Mass. However, when circumstances require, the blessing and distribution of ashes may take place apart from Mass, during a celebration of the word of God.*

*1657 This order may also be used when ashes are brought to the sick. According to circumstances, the rite may be abbreviated by the minister. Nevertheless, at least one Scripture reading should be included in the service.*

*1658 If already blessed ashes are brought to the sick, the blessing is omitted and the distribution takes place immediately after the homily. The homily should conclude by inviting the sick person to prepare himself or herself for the reception of the ashes.*

*1659 This rite may be celebrated by a priest or deacon who may be assisted by lay ministers in the distribution of the ashes. The blessing of the ashes, however, is reserved to a priest or deacon.*

*Endnote: 7. This blessing is an adaptation of the rite for the blessing and distribution of ashes on Ash Wednesday in The Roman Missal.*

***(Following the ritual, any leftover ashes should be buried in a dignified location.)***

## Prayer

### ORDER OF BLESSING

### INTRODUCTORY RITES

*1660 When the community has gathered, a suitable song may be sung. After the singing, the minister says: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.*

*All make the sign of the cross and reply: Amen.*

*1662 A lay minister greets those present in the following words: Praised be the God of grace, mercy, and peace. Blessed be God for ever. R. Blessed be God for ever.*

*1663 In the following words, the minister prepares those present for the blessing and distribution of the ashes. My brothers and sisters, the hour of God's favor draws near, the day of his mercy and of our salvation approaches, when death was destroyed and eternal life began. As we begin this season of Lent, we gather today to acknowledge that we are sinners. As we express our sorrow, may God be merciful to us and restore us to his friendship.*

### OPENING PRAYER

*1664 The minister then says the opening prayer. Let us pray...*

*After a brief period of silence, the minister continues:*

Father in heaven, the light of your truth bestows sight to the darkness of sinful eyes. May this season of repentance bring us the blessing of your forgiveness and the gift of your light.

Grant this through Christ our Lord.

R. Amen.

## READING OF THE WORD OF GOD

*1665 A reader, another person present, or the minister reads a text of sacred Scripture.*

Brothers and sisters, listen to the words of the prophet Joel:  
(2:12-18 *Let your hearts be broken, and not your garments torn.*)

Yet 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.

*1666 Or: 2 Corinthians 5:20-6:2--Be reconciled to God, now is the acceptable time. Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18--Your Father, who sees all that is done in secret, will reward you.*

*1667 As circumstances suggest, the following responsorial psalm may be sung, or some other suitable song.*

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

*Psalm 51* 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.

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"-- That you may be justified in your sentence, vindicated when you condemn. R.

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.

Give me back the joy of your salvation, and a willing spirit sustain in me. R.

O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall proclaim your praise. R.

*1668 As circumstances suggest, the minister may give those present a brief explanation of the biblical text, so that they may understand through faith the meaning of the celebration.*

## **DISTRIBUTION OF THE ASHES**

*1671 The minister then places the ashes on those who come forward, saying to each:*

Turn away from sin and be faithful to the gospel.

*Or:* Remember, you are dust and to dust you will return.

*1672 Meanwhile some of the following antiphons or other appropriate songs are sung.*

*Antiphon 1* Come back to the Lord with all your heart; leave the past in ashes, and turn to God with tears and fasting, for he is slow to anger and ready to forgive.

*Antiphon 2* Let the priests and ministers of the Lord lament before his altar, and say: Spare us, Lord; spare your people! Do not let us die for we are crying out to you.

*Antiphon 3* Lord, take away our wickedness.

*These may be repeated after each verse of Psalm 51, "Have mercy on me, O God."*

## **RESPONSORY**

Direct our hearts to better things, O Lord; heal our sin and ignorance. Lord, do not face us suddenly with death, but give us time to repent. R. Turn to us with mercy, Lord: we have sinned against you. V. Help us, God our savior, rescue us for the honor of your name. R. Turn to us with mercy, Lord; we have sinned against you.

1673 *After the giving of ashes the minister's hands are washed; the rite concludes with the general intercessions and the final blessing.*

## INTERCESSIONS

1674 *The intercessions are then said. The minister introduces them and an assisting minister or one of those present announces the intentions. From the following those best suited to the occasion may be used or adapted, or other intentions that apply to the particular circumstances may be composed.*

*The minister says:* Our merciful Father does not desire the death of sinners but rather that they should turn from their sins and have life. Let us pray that we who are sorry for our sins may fear no future evil and sin no more.

R. Lord, hear our prayer.

*Assisting minister:* By human weakness we have disfigured the holiness of the Church: pardon all our sins and restore us to full communion with our brothers and sisters. R.

*Assisting minister:* Grant the forgiveness of sins and the gift of new life to those who will be baptized this Easter. R.

*Assisting minister:* Your mercy is our hope: welcome us to the sacrament of reconciliation. R.

*Assisting minister:* Give us the will to change our lives, and the lives of others, by charity, good example, and prayer. R.

*Assisting minister:* Make us a living sign of your love for all to see: people reconciled with you and each other. R.

1675 *After the intercessions the minister, in the following or similar words, invites all present to sing or say the Lord's Prayer:*

Now, in obedience to Christ himself, let us join in prayer to the Father, asking him to forgive us as we forgive others.

*All:* Our Father . . .

*The minister adds:*

Father, our source of life, you know our weakness. May we reach out with joy to grasp your hand and to walk more readily in your ways.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

R. Amen.

## **CONCLUDING RITE**

*1676 The minister concludes the rite by saying:*

May the Father bless us, for he has adopted us as his children. R. Amen.

May the Son come to help us, for he has received us as brothers and sisters. R. Amen.

May the Spirit be with us, for he has made us his dwelling place. R. Amen.

*Prayer Source: Book of Blessings by Prepared by International Commission on English in the Liturgy A Joint Commission of Catholic Bishops' Conferences, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, 1989*