



The Liturgy of Ash Wednesday



**Wednesday, 18th February, 2026,
12:00pm**

Welcome to Coventry Cathedral

Ash Wednesday is the English name for the first day of Lent, stemming from the tradition of making the sign of the Cross, in ash, as a sign of penitence.

Penitence is the key theme of this service and takes a central place in the liturgy as a response to Scripture and preaching. The use of ash – a feature of this day in the Western church since at least the tenth century – is a powerful symbol of sorrow for our sins, a reminder of our frailty and, ultimately, our mortality.

Ashes were used in ancient times, according to the Bible, to express mourning. An example is found in Job 42:3 – 6, where Job says to God: *'I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore, I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.'*

Dusting oneself with ashes was the penitent's way of expressing sorrow for sins and faults.

The words used at the imposition of ashes – *'Remember that you are dust...'* – take us back to the Creation stories in Genesis, reminding us of our dependence on God, and our failure as human beings to be faithful to his love.

In this service we say the words in **bold** together, and stand and sit as indicated. You are welcome to remain seated if you prefer.

The president and preacher today is the Right Reverend Sophie Jelley, Bishop of Coventry. The deacon is the Reverend Kate Massey, Canon for Arts and Reconciliation. The sub-deacon is the Very Reverend John Witcombe, Dean of Coventry.

The Lay Clerks are directed by Adam Heron, Cathedral Organ Scholar. The service setting is Mass for Three Voices by William Byrd (1540-1623).

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Before the service, Adam Heron, Organ Scholar, plays Fantasia on Aus der Tiefe by Kenneth Leighton (1929-1988)

The Gathering

We STAND as the ministers process to the altar on the organ voluntary.

The Litany of Reconciliation

The Right Reverend Sophie Jelley, Bishop of Coventry, president, introduces:

All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

The hatred which divides nation from nation, race from race, class from class,

Father, forgive.

The covetous desires of people and nations
to possess what is not their own,

Father, forgive.

The greed which exploits the work of human hands
and lays waste the earth,

Father, forgive.

Our envy of the welfare and happiness of others,

Father, forgive.

Our indifference to the plight of the imprisoned,
the homeless, the refugee,

Father, forgive.

The lust which dishonours the bodies
of men, women and children,

Father, forgive.

The pride which leads us to trust in ourselves and not in God,

Father, forgive.

Be kind to one another, tender-hearted,
forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

The Greeting

The president says,

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you
and also with you.

Introduction

The president explains the meaning of Lent.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: since early days Christians have observed with great devotion the time of our Lord's passion and resurrection, and prepared for this with a season of penitence and fasting.

By carefully keeping these days, Christians take to heart the call to repentance and the assurance of forgiveness proclaimed in the Gospel, and so grow in faith and in devotion to our Lord.

I invite you, therefore, in the name of the Church, to the observance of a holy Lent, by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God's holy Word.

The Kyrie

The Lay Clerks sing:

Kyrie, eleison.

Christe, eleison.

Kyrie, eleison.

Lord, have mercy upon us.

Christ, have mercy upon us.

Lord, have mercy upon us.

The Collect

The president introduces a period of silent prayer before saying the Collect.

Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing that you have made and forgive the sins of all those who are penitent: create and make in us new and contrite hearts that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may receive from you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

The Liturgy of the Word

The Old Testament Reading

We SIT as Donald Parr, Cathedral Lay Reader, reads the Old Testament Reading.

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.

¹ Shout out, do not hold back!

Lift up your voice like a trumpet!

Announce to my people their rebellion,
to the house of Jacob their sins.

² Yet day after day they seek me
and delight to know my ways,

as if they were a nation that practised righteousness
and did not forsake the ordinance of their God;
they ask of me righteous judgements,
they delight to draw near to God.

³ 'Why do we fast, but you do not see?

Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?'

Look, you serve your own interest on your fast-day,
and oppress all your workers.

⁴ Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight
and to strike with a wicked fist.

Such fasting as you do today
will not make your voice heard on high.

⁵ Is such the fast that I choose,
a day to humble oneself?

Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush,
and to lie in sackcloth and ashes?

Will you call this a fast,
a day acceptable to the Lord?

⁶ Is not this the fast that I choose:

to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?

⁷ Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover them,
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?
⁸ Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up quickly;
your vindicator shall go before you,
the glory of the Lord shall be your rearguard.
⁹ Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;
you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.
If you remove the yoke from among you,
the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,
¹⁰ if you offer your food to the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,
then your light shall rise in the darkness
and your gloom be like the noonday.
¹¹ The Lord will guide you continually,
and satisfy your needs in parched places,
and make your bones strong;
and you shall be like a watered garden,
like a spring of water,
whose waters never fail.
¹² Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;
you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;
you shall be called the repairer of the breach,
the restorer of streets to live in.

Isaiah 58:1 - 12

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Gradual Hymn

We *STAND* to sing:

**Forty days and forty nights
thou wast fasting in the wild;
forty days and forty nights
tempted, and yet undefiled.**

**Sunbeams scorching all the day;
chilly dew-drops nightly shed;
prowling beasts about thy way;
stones thy pillow, earth thy bed.**

**Shall not we thy sorrows share,
and from earthly joys abstain,
fasting with unceasing prayer,
glad with thee to suffer pain?**

**And if Satan, vexing sore,
flesh or spirit should assail,
thou, his vanquisher before,
grant we may not faint nor fail.**

**So shall we have peace divine;
holier gladness ours shall be;
round us too shall angels shine,
such as ministered to thee.**

**Keep, O keep us, Saviour dear,
ever constant by thy side;
that with thee we may appear
at the eternal Eastertide.**

Words by G.H. Smyttan (1822-1870) and F. Pott (1832-1909)

Tune CP 95 Aus der Tiefe (Heinlein) from Nürnbergisches Gesangbuch (1676)

The Gospel

The Reverend Kate Massey, Canon for Arts and Reconciliation, deacon, says,

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew.

Glory to you, O Lord.

¹ 'Beware of practising your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

² 'So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ³ But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

⁵ 'And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ⁶ But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

¹⁶ 'And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward.

¹⁷ But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

¹⁹ 'Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal;

²⁰ but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal.

²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Matthew 6:1 - 6, 12 - 21

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

Sermon

The Right Reverend Sophie Jelley, Bishop of Coventry, preaching, prays, and then we SIT. After the sermon, time is kept for reflection.

The Liturgy of Penitence

Prayer of Confession

The president says,

Let us now call to mind our sin and the infinite mercy of God.

The deacon leads the prayer of confession saying,

God the Father,
have mercy on us.

God the Son,
have mercy on us.

God the Holy Spirit,
have mercy on us.

Trinity of love,
have mercy on us.

Most merciful God,
Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
we confess that we have sinned
in thought, word and deed.
We have not loved you
with our whole heart, and mind, and strength.
We have not loved our neighbours as ourselves.
We have not forgiven others, as we have been forgiven.
Lord, have mercy.

We have been deaf to your call to serve,
as Christ served us.
We have not been true to the mind of Christ.
We have grieved your Holy Spirit.
Lord, have mercy.

We confess to you, Lord,
all our past unfaithfulness:
the pride, hypocrisy, and impatience of our lives,
Lord, have mercy.

Our self-indulgent appetites and ways,
and our exploitation of other people,
Lord, have mercy.

Our anger at our own frustration,
and our envy of those more fortunate than ourselves,
Lord, have mercy.

Our intemperate love of worldly goods and comforts,
and our dishonesty in daily life and work,
Lord, have mercy.

Our negligence in prayer and worship,
and our failure to commend the faith that is in us,
Lord, have mercy.

Accept our repentance, Lord
for the wrongs we have done,
for our blindness to human need and suffering,
and our indifference to injustice and cruelty,
Accept our repentance, Lord.

For all false judgments,
for uncharitable thoughts towards our neighbours,
and for our prejudice and contempt
towards those who differ from us,
Accept our repentance, Lord.

For our waste and pollution of your Creation,
and our lack of concern for those who come after us,
Accept our repentance, Lord.

Restore us, good Lord, and let your anger depart from us;
Favourably hear us, for your mercy is great.

Accomplish in us the work of your salvation,
That we may show your glory in the world.

By the Cross and passion of your Son our Lord,
Bring us with all your saints to the joy of his resurrection.

Silence is kept. The deacon leads us in saying:

We have not loved you with our whole heart.

We have not loved our neighbours as ourselves.

In your mercy

forgive what we have been,

help us to amend what we are,

and direct what we shall be;

that we may do justly, love mercy,

and walk humbly with you, our God.

Amen.

The Imposition of Ashes

The president says,

Dear friends in Christ,

I invite you to receive ashes as a sign of the spirit of penitence with which we shall keep this season of Lent.

God our Father,

you create us from the dust of the earth.

Grant that these ashes may be for us

a sign of our penitence and a symbol of our mortality;

for it is by your grace alone that we receive eternal life in Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Amen.

The president and ministers receive the imposition of ashes. Please come to one of the clergy nearest to you to receive the imposition of ashes, as they say to you:

Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.

Turn away from sin, and be faithful to Christ.

During the imposition of ashes, the Lay Clerks sing:

Parce mihi, Domine, nihil enim
sunt dies mei

Quid est homo, quia magnificas
eum? Aut quid apponis erga eum
cor tuum?

Visitas eum diluculo et subito
probas illum
Usquequo non parcis mihi, nec
dimittis me, ut glutiam salivam
meam?

Peccavi, quid faciam tibi, o custos
hominum? Quare posuisti me
contrarium tibi, et factus sum
mihimet ipsi gravis?

Cur non tolles peccatum meum, et
quare non aufers iniquitatem
meam? Ecce, nunc in pulvere
dormiam, et si mane me
quaesieris, non subsistam

Spare me, O Lord, for my days
are nothing

What is man, that you magnify
him? Or why do you set your
heart on him?

You visit him early in the
morning and test him suddenly.
How long will you not spare
me, and not let me swallow my
spittle?

I have sinned, what shall I do to
you, O guardian of mankind?
Why have you set me against
you, and have I become a
burden to myself?

Why do you not take away my
sin, and why do you not take
away my iniquity? Behold, now I
shall sleep in the dust; and if
you seek me in the morning, I
shall not be.

Music by Cristobal de Morales (1500-1553)

In manus tuas, Domine,
commendo spiritum meum.
Redemisti me Domine, Deus
veritatis.

*Into your hands, O Lord, I
commend my spirit.
You have redeemed me, O Lord,
O God of truth.*

*Words John 6:30
Music by John Sheppard (1515-1558)*

Once everyone who wishes to have received the imposition of ashes, the president says,

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.

The Liturgy of the Sacrament

The Peace

The president says,

Since we are justified by faith,
we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,
who has given us access to his grace.

The peace of the Lord be always with you:

And also with you.

The deacon says,

Let us offer one another a sign of peace.

Everyone shares a greeting of peace.

Prayer of Preparation

The president says,

Merciful Father,
turn us from sin to faithfulness
and from disobedience to love,
and prepare us to celebrate
the death and resurrection of Christ our Saviour,
who is alive and reigns
now and for ever.

Amen.

The Eucharistic Prayer

The president says, and everyone responds:

The Lord be with you
and also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give thanks and praise.

It is indeed right and good to give you thanks and praise,
almighty God and everlasting Father,
through Jesus Christ your Son.
For in these forty days you lead us
into the desert of repentance,
that through a pilgrimage of prayer and discipline
we may grow in grace and learn to be your people once again.
Through fasting, prayer, and acts of service
you bring us back to your generous heart.
Through study of your holy Word
you open our eyes to your presence in the world
and free our hands to welcome others
to the radiant splendour of your love.
As we prepare to celebrate the Easter feast
with joyful hearts and minds,
we bless you for your mercy
and join with saints and angels,
for ever praising you and singing:

The Lay Clerks sing:

Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus
Dominus Deus Sabaoth.
Pleni sunt cæli et terra gloria tua.
Hosanna in excelsis.
Benedictus qui venit
in nomine Domini.
Hosanna in excelsis.

*Holy, holy, holy,
Lord God of hosts.
Heaven and earth are full of thy glory.
Glory be to thee, O Lord most high.
Blessed is he that cometh
in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.*

The president continues,

We praise and bless you, loving Father,
through Jesus Christ, our Lord;
and as we obey his command,
send your Holy Spirit,
that broken bread and wine outpoured
may be for us the body and blood of your dear Son.

On the night before he died he had supper with his friends
and, taking bread, he praised you.

He broke the bread, gave it to them and said:

Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you;
do this in remembrance of me.

When supper was ended he took the cup of wine.

Again he praised you, gave it to them and said:

Drink this, all of you;
this is my blood of the new covenant,
which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

So, Father, we remember all that Jesus did.

In him we plead with confidence his sacrifice
made once for all upon the cross.

Bringing before you the bread of life and cup of salvation,
we proclaim his death and resurrection
until he comes in glory.

The deacon says,

Jesus Christ is Lord.

**Lord, by your cross and resurrection,
you have set us free.**

You are the Saviour of the world.

The president continues,

Lord of all life,
help us to work together for that day
when your kingdom comes
and justice and mercy will be seen in all the earth.
Look with favour on your people,
gather us in your loving arms
and bring us with all the saints
to feast at your table in heaven.

By whom and with whom,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all honour and glory be unto thee,
almighty Father, for ever and ever.

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Please feel free to say the Lord's Prayer in any language or version is closest to your heart. The president says,

Lord Jesus, remember us in your kingdom
and teach us to pray:

**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.

The Breaking of the Bread

The president breaks the bread, and says,

Every time we eat this bread and drink this cup
we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

The Invitation to Communion

The president says,

Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Blessed are those who are called to his supper.

**Lord, I am not worthy to receive you,
but only say the word and I shall be healed.**

Agnus Dei

The Lay Clerks Sing:

Agnus Dei,
qui tollis peccata mundi,
miserere nobis.

Agnus Dei,
qui tollis peccata mundi,
miserere nobis.

Agnus Dei,
qui tollis peccata mundi,
dona nobis pacem.

*O Lamb of God,
that takest away the sins of the world,
have mercy upon us.*

*O Lamb of God, that takest away the
sins of the world,
have mercy upon us.*

*O Lamb of God, that takest away the
sins of the world,
grant us thy peace.*

The Giving of Communion

It is our custom for this part of the service to be a time of quiet reflection.

Please wait in your seat to be directed by a churchwarden or steward. If you wish to receive gluten-free bread, please ask and we will be happy to accommodate. Those who do not intend to receive Communion, but who would prefer to receive a blessing, are asked to carry this booklet as an indication of your preference to the ministers.

The Anthem

O Jesu Christe, miserere mei
Cum dolore languéo:
O Domine, tu es spes mea
Clamavi ad te, miserere mei

Voce mea ad Dominum clamavi:
Voce mea ad Dominum
deprecatus sum
Me expectant justi
Donec retribuas mihi
Clamavi ad te, miserere mei

O Jesus Christ, have mercy on me
When I languish in pain:
O Lord, you are my hope
I have cried to you, have mercy on me
With my voice I have cried to the Lord:
With my voice I have prayed to the
Lord
The righteous await me
Until you reward me
I have cried to you, have mercy on me

Music by Jacquet de Berchem (1505-1567)

Prayers after Communion

The president says,

Almighty God, you have given your only Son to be for us both a sacrifice for sin and also an example of godly life. Give us grace that we may always most thankfully receive these his inestimable gifts, and also daily endeavour to follow the blessed steps of his most holy life; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

The president introduces this prayer of Saint Anselm, which we say together:

O Lord our God,
**grant us grace to desire you with our whole heart;
that so desiring, we may seek and find you;
and so finding, may love you;
and so loving, may hate those sins
from which you have delivered us;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.**
Amen.

The Dismissal

Final Hymn

We *STAND* to sing:

**Lord Jesus, think on me,
and purge away my sin;
from earthborn passions set me free,
and make me pure within.**

**Lord Jesus, think on me
with many a care opprest;
let me thy loving servant be,
and taste thy promised rest.**

**Lord Jesus, think on me,
nor let me go astray;
through darkness and perplexity
point thou the heavenly way.**

**Lord Jesus, think on me,
that, when the flood is past,
I may the eternal brightness see,
and share thy joy at last.**

*Words by Synesius of Cyrene (c.365-c.414) tr. A.W. Chatfield (1808-1896)
Tune CP 97 Southwell from Psalm 45 in 'The Psalms in English Metre' (1579)
adapted by William Daman (1540-1579)*

The Responsory

The president leads the responsory:

**This is love, not that we loved God.
but that he loved us and sent his Son.**

**He is the sacrifice for our sins,
that we might live through him.**

**If God loves us so much
we ought to love one another.**

**If we love one another,
God lives in us**

1 John 4:12

The Blessing and Dismissal

The president says,

May God the Father,
who does not despise the broken spirit,
give to you a contrite heart.

Amen.

May Christ,
who bore our sins in his body on the tree,
heal you by his wounds.

Amen.

May the Holy Spirit,
who leads you into all truth,
speak to you words of pardon and peace.

Amen.

And the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among you, and remain with you always.

Amen.

The deacon dismisses the congregation, saying:
Go in peace to share the reconciling love of God.

In the name of Christ. Amen

The ministers process out on the organ voluntary.

The Organ Voluntary

Fantasia in C minor BWV 562 by Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

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Thank you for your support.

