Ash Wednesday

Prayers for the Distribution of Ashes
Outside of Mass

Presider: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

Presider: My sisters and brothers, as we begin this holy season of Lent, the prophet's call rings like a trumpet blast awakening the entire church with a call to repentance.

Today we will be visibly marked, signed on the forehead with ashes, as we admit of hearts grown cold; and as we confess our reliance upon the God who promises to breathe new life into our spirits.

Through penance, prayer and acts of charity; may we be reconciled to God through the One who took on our flesh.

Now, as we set out on this pilgrim journey, let us ask that God's Spirit will light a path of salvation and forgiveness in our hearts.
Opening Prayer

Presider: Let us pray.

Grant, O Lord, that we may begin with holy fasting this campaign of Christian service, so that, as we take up battle against spiritual evils, we may be armed with weapons of self-restraint.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

Liturgy of the Word
A Reading from the Book of the Prophet Joel:

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.

The Word of the Lord.
R  Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.

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  Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.

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."

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

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  Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.

Give me back the joy of your salvation, and a willing spirit sustain in me. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall proclaim your praise.

R  Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.
A Reading from the Second Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians:

Brothers and sisters:
We are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us.

We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who did not know sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

Working together, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For he says:

In an acceptable time I heard you, and on the day of salvation I helped you.

Behold, now is a very acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

The Word of the Lord.
Please stand...and be attentive to a reading from Matthew’s Gospel:

Jesus said to his disciples:
"Take care not to perform righteous deeds
in order that people may see them;
otherwise, you will have no recompense from your heavenly Father.
When you give alms,
do not blow a trumpet before you,
as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets
to win the praise of others.
Amen, I say to you,
they have received their reward.
But when you give alms,
do not let your left hand know what your right is doing,
so that your almsgiving may be secret.
And your Father who sees in secret will repay you.

"When you pray,
do not be like the hypocrites,
who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners
so that others may see them.
Amen, I say to you,
they have received their reward.
But when you pray, go to your inner room,
close the door, and pray to your Father in secret.
And your Father who sees in secret will repay you.

"When you fast,
do not look gloomy like the hypocrites.
They neglect their appearance,
so that they may appear to others to be fasting.
Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward.
But when you fast,
anoint your head and wash your face,
so that you may not appear to be fasting,
except to your Father who is hidden.
And your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you."

...Please be seated...
Fr. David shares with us the following reflections as we begin our Lenten Season:

"If you wish, you can make me clean." With these words from this past Sunday’s Liturgy of the Word, an ostracized leper pleads with the Lord Jesus. First and foremost, the leper admits that he needs to be made clean, that he is, in fact, “unclean”. He admits of his broken state. Once he is able to state this real truth, only then can he ask the Lord to work His miracle of healing and restoration.

"I do will it. Be made clean." And with these words, the Lord frees the man and restores him to health and wholeness. What is Jesus’ clear will? That the one who is in need has his need met with compassion.

As we begin this Lenten Season, we do so by accepting the imposition of ashes upon our heads. Within this ‘little mystery’ is a depth of significance.

"Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return” recalls our lowliness, reminds us of our sinful tendencies, of our primordial banal desire to overthrow God as the Lord, and replace Him with our own selves. But by accepting these ashes, we—like the leper—are first and foremost aware of our sin, and we declare before God and all of the Church, that we are sinful. And from our sin, we reach out in faith to the Lord Jesus as our Savior. Only He can bring healing; only He can restore us to dignity; only Christ can redeem us from our fallen state.

"Repent, and believe in the Gospel” is the cry of the Baptist as he invites all to come to faith in Jesus Christ. As we accept ashes upon our heads today, we hear this same invitation echoed over again. Yes, we have the capacity to hear the Good News and then to believe...to place our faith in God’s Living Word. My brothers and sisters, throughout these next forty days, recall with great regularity that Christ wills us to have faith, in spite of our sinfulness; He wills us to be clean and to be restored to wholeness in Him; He wills that our works of charity and penance don’t weigh us down, but rather, lift all of humanity up; He wills that as we receive His great compassion, we also share such compassion with those who are in any need. Yes, our forty days call us to re-awaken the gifts of the Holy Spirit that still are very much present within each one of us...ready now to be borne again—by us and through us—in this Lenten Season. May the pattern of life we begin today, lead us to the great joy of Easter.

(sit down for a few moments, and then signal ushers to take up our collection)
After the reflection, and before the distribution of ashes, the people are given the opportunity to share their gifts with the Church: the collection is taken up.

After the collection is taken up, the presider begins with the distribution of ashes in the following manner:

**Distribution of Ashes**

**Presider:** Dear friends in Christ,
These ashes were blessed at this morning’s Mass, and are shared with us for our devotion.

(Pause for silent prayer.)

**Presider:** Lord,
We pray for us sinners who ask for your forgiveness.

May we keep this Lenten season in preparation for the joy of Easter. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

**All:** Amen.

**Presider:** Now as a sign of our willingness to repent and be converted in this Lenten season, let us all come forward now and accept the sign of the cross in ashes upon our foreheads.

**Formula for Distribution:**

**Minister:** “Ashes to ashes, dust to dust.”
General Intercessions

As we begin our Lenten journey, we see Jesus' cross as a sign of Easter Victory. Seeking His guidance and direction as we follow in His way, we offer our prayers and petitions.

- For the Church:
  give us the strength to make our intentions a reality as we strive to turn from sin and to be faithful to the Gospel.
  We pray to the Lord.

- For our world:
  that in spite of human failure and a lack of response to the disadvantaged, may our hopes never dim or die in the face of difficulty.
  We pray to the Lord.

- For all those preparing to enter the Church at Easter:
  may our love and prayers during these final days of preparation be of support to them.
  We pray to the Lord.

- For those who feel alienated:
  speak tenderly to their hearts and open them to the depths of your love; give them the joy of true repentance.
  We pray to the Lord.

- For the sick, the hospitalized, & for all in need of our prayers; (...pause...) and for those who sleep in death.
  We pray to the Lord.

Heavenly Father,
accept the petitions we place before you with humble, contrite hearts. Lead us with the light of your Spirit through these holy days so that all of us may know the joy of your salvation. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Amen.
**Concluding Rite**

*Presider:* May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life...

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

*All:* Amen.

*Presider:* Let us go in peace.

*All:* Thanks be to God.