

## ORDER FOR THE BLESSING AND DISTRIBUTION OF ASHES

*This resource has been prepared with texts from Roman Ritual “Book of Blessings” (1989) and the English Translation of the Third Edition of the Roman Missal, © 2011 United States Conference of the Catholic Bishops.*

*It includes separate texts for when a priest or deacon presides, or when a lay minister leads.*

### INTRODUCTION FROM THE BOOK OF BLESSINGS

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.

### FROM THE THIRD EDITION OF THE ROMAN MISSAL (p. 212)

The blessing and distribution of ashes may also take place outside Mass. In this case, the rite is preceded by a Liturgy of the Word, with the Entrance Antiphon, the Collect, and the readings with their chants as at Mass. Then there follow the Homily and the blessing and distribution of ashes. The rite is concluded with the Universal Prayer, the Blessing, and the Dismissal of the Faithful.

# Entrance Rite

When the community has gathered, a suitable song may be sung. After the singing, the minister says:

## GREETING

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

The people reply:

Amen.

When a priest or deacon presides, he extends his hands and greets the people, saying:

The grace, the mercy, and the peace of God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior be with you.

The people reply:

And with your spirit.

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When a lay minister presides, the following greeting is used:

Praised be the God of grace, mercy, and peace. Blessed be God for ever.

**R.** Blessed be God for ever.

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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 COLLECT

Let us pray

Pause for silent prayer

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. **R.** Amen

All are seated.

## READING OF THE WORD OF GOD

As circumstances suggest, two or three scripture passages could be proclaimed, plus a responsorial psalm, as at Mass for Ash Wednesday, (Lect. No. 219). Or simply one reading and a responsorial psalm, as provided here:

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:

*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.

The Word of the Lord  
R. Thanks be to God

PSALM 51

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

**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.**

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.**

**Presider:** The Lord be with you

**The people reply:** And with your spirit.

**Presider:** A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew

**The people reply:** Glory to you Lord.

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."

**Presider:** The Gospel of the Lord

**The people reply:** Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ.

## BLESSING OF ASHES (if presided by Priest or Deacon)

After the Homily, the Priest, standing with hands joined, says:

Dear brothers and sisters,  
let us humbly ask God our Father  
that he be pleased to bless with the abundance of his  
grace these ashes, which we will put on our heads in  
penitence.

After a brief prayer in silence and, with hands extended, he continues:

O God, who desire not the death of  
sinners, but their conversion,  
mercifully hear our prayers  
and in your kindness, be pleased to bless these  
ashes, which we intend to receive upon our heads,  
that we, who acknowledge we are but  
ashes and shall return to dust,  
may, through a steadfast observance of  
Lent, gain pardon for sins and newness of  
life after the likeness of your Risen Son.  
Who lives and reigns for ever and ever.  
R. Amen.

He sprinkles the ashes with holy water, without saying anything.

## PREPARATION OF THE ASHES (if presided by a Lay person)

After the Gospel, the celebrant invites all to seated and observe a few moments of silence reflecting about the Gospel just heard:

After a reasonable time in silence he/she invites the community to stand and prepares them for the imposition of ashes:

Dear brothers and sisters,  
let us humbly ask God our Father  
that he be pleased to bless us with the abundance of his grace,  
as we receive these blessed ashes on our foreheads.

After a brief prayer in silence and, he/she continues:

O God, who are moved by acts of humility  
and respond with forgiveness to works of penance,  
lend your merciful ears to our prayers  
and in your kindness, pour out the grace of your blessing  
on these your servants gathered here to receive the blessed ashes.  
Marked with these ashes, we may be prompted  
to follow the Lenten observances, and may come with minds made pure  
to celebrate the Paschal Mystery of your Son.  
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

R. Amen.

Please invite the community to come forward to receive the ashes as they come to receive the communion. During the imposition of the ashes a suitable penitential song may be sung.

The presider invites those assigned to assist for the imposition of the ashes to come forward to receive the ashes and the hands over to them the container with ashes. Each go to their assigned place and the community comes forward like when they come for communion.

## DISTRIBUTION OF ASHES

Then the priests and/or ministers place ashes on the head of all those present who come to him, saying to each one:

Repent, and believe in the Gospel.

Or:

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

If no singing, some of the following antiphons could be recited.

### Antiphon 1

Let us change our garments to sackcloth and ashes,  
let us fast and weep before the Lord,  
that our God, rich in mercy, might forgive us our sins.

### Antiphon 2

Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord,  
stand between the porch and the altar and weep and cry out:  
Spare O Lord, your people;  
do not close the mouths of those who sing your praise, O Lord. (Cf.  
Joel 2:17; Esther 4:17)

### Antiphon 3

Blot out my transgressions, O Lord. (Psalm 51 (50):3)

These may be repeated after each verse of Psalm 51 (50), (Have mercy on me, O God.)

Another appropriate chant may also be sung.

After the distribution of ashes, the priest or minister wash their hands.

The intercessions follow:

The Creed is not said.

## INTERCESSIONS

The intercessions are then said. The minister introduces them and an assisting minister or one of the 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 leader 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, as we say:  
Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Reader:

1. By human weakness we have disfigured the holiness of the Church:  
pardon all our sins and reconcile us with our brothers and sisters.  
We pray: **R. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.**
2. Grant the forgiveness of sins and the gift of new life  
to those who will be baptized or received into full communion this Easter.  
We pray: **R. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.**
3. Your mercy is our hope: welcome us to the sacrament of reconciliation.  
We pray: **R. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.**
4. Give us the will to change our lives, and the lives of others,  
by charity, good example, and prayer. R.  
We pray: **R. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.**
5. Make us a living sign of your love for all to see:  
people reconciled with you and each other. We  
pray: **R. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

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 other.

All:

Our Father...

After the Our Father the Celebrant 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.

## THE CONCLUDING RITES

For the dismissal, the Priest stands facing the people and, extending his hands over them, says this prayer:

Pour out a spirit of compunction, O God,  
on those who bow before your majesty,  
and by your mercy may they merit the rewards you promise  
to those who do penance.  
Through Christ our Lord.

If the Presider is a Priest or Deacon He then blesses the people in the usual way.

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If the Presider is a lay person makes the sign of the cross on himself or herself while saying:

May almighty God bless us,  
protect us from all evil  
and lead us to everlasting life.  
All: Amen.

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*It is preferable to end the celebration with a suitable song.*