



Ash Wednesday @home

*Cultivating
the Soil of the Soul
through Lent*

During this pandemic when we cannot normally gather safely together in our sanctuaries, we can still mark this holy day of Ash Wednesday with intention with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

This liturgy is designed to create sacred space in our home sanctuary to mark Ash Wednesday and the beginning of Lent.

Welcome.

Preparing for Ash Wednesday:

A few days before Ash Wednesday, you are invited to go to their yard, garden, farm, or nearby park and collect some soil. Collect enough soil to fill a large bowl. Have this bowl ready for when you engage the Ash Wednesday liturgy whether that be on your own, over zoom, at an outdoor gathering, or indoor-safely space with others.

Gathering Materials to Be Ready for Home Worship:

If engaging the Ash Wednesday Liturgy alone at home, gather your bowl of soil, this liturgy, maybe a candle and something to write with and on, and your computer/phone if you'd like to access the bishop's sermon.

How to Incorporate the Bowl into Your Lent:

This bowl of soil is to remain with you throughout Lent and into Holy Week. You are invited to place this bowl of soil in a place in your home where you pray or that is somehow sacred to you or central to your daily life.

During Lent 2021, we are encouraged to "tend" the soil in this bowl. Such tending could include placing a cross or crucifix in the soil, or a picture of a loved one many years gone. You could also plant a seed in the soil ("unless the seed dies") as an indication that our Lenten journey is taking us to Easter Spring. This tending time is also a chance for all of us to be creative and mindful about how we tend the soil, realizing the tending of soil metaphor is a rich one for encouraging our spiritual growth.

During this plague season, high-tech, computer savvy skills have been in high demand and rightly acknowledged. These skills have helped all of us upgrade online offerings and improve sound systems and kept us connected digitally.

It could be argued that the tending of soil is the original tech. So, a spiritual practice that invites the wisdom and gifts that slows us down is a welcome opportunity to balance us where high-tech has sped us up.

Liturgy for Ash Wednesday

The Word of God

Opening Prayer

Let us thank the Earth
That offers ground for home
And holds our feet firm
To walk in space open
To infinite galaxies.

Let us salute the silence
And certainty of mountains:
Their sublime stillness,
Their dream-filled hearts.

The wonder of a garden
Trusting the first warmth of spring
Until its black infinity of cells
Becomes charred with dream;
Then the silent, slow nurture
Of the seed's self, coaxing it
To trust the act of death.

The humility of the Earth
That transfigures all
That has fallen
Of outlived growth.

The kindness of the Earth,
Opening to receive
Our worn forms
Into the final stillness.

Let us ask forgiveness of the Earth
For all our sins against her:
For our violence and poisonings
Of her beauty.

Let us remember within us
The ancient clay,
Holding the memory of seasons,
The passion of the wind,
The fluency of water,
The warmth of fire,
The quiver-touch of the sun
And shadowed sureness of the moon.

That we may awaken,
To live to the full
The dream of the Earth
Who chose us to emerge
And incarnate its hidden night
In mind, spirit, and light.

— *John O'Donohue, portion of In Praise of the Earth, To Bless the Space Between Us: A Book of Blessings*

Collect

Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing you have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Invitation to a Holy Lent

As People of God: The first Christians observed with great devotion the days of our Lord's passion and resurrection, and it became the custom of the Church to prepare for them by a season of penitence and fasting. This season of Lent provided a time in which converts to the faith were prepared for Holy Baptism. It was also a time when those who, because of notorious sins, had been separated from the body of the faithful were reconciled by penitence and forgiveness, and restored to the fellowship of the Church. Thereby, the whole congregation was put in mind of the message of pardon and absolution set forth in the Gospel of our Savior, and of the need which all Christians continually have to renew their repentance and faith.

We are invited, 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. And, to make a right beginning of repentance, and as a mark of our mortal nature.

Psalm 51: 11-18

- 11 Create in me a clean heart, O God, *
 and renew a right spirit within me.
- 12 Cast me not away from your presence *
 and take not your holy Spirit from me.
- 13 Give me the joy of your saving help again *
 and sustain me with your bountiful Spirit.

- 14 I shall teach your ways to the wicked, *
and sinners shall return to you.
- 15 Deliver me from death, O God, *
and my tongue shall sing of your righteousness,
O God of my salvation.
- 16 Open my lips, O Lord, *
and my mouth shall proclaim your praise.
- 17 Had you desired it, I would have offered sacrifice; *
but you take no delight in burnt-offerings.
- 18 The sacrifice of God is a troubled spirit; *
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

Give yourself some time to reflect on how you have strayed from God over the past year. This may also be a time to reflect on aspects of your life, relationships, work that are not aligned with your faith. You don't have to figure anything out about these aspects of your life; it is more about a willingness to be courageous in your honesty and bring whatever you find before God. No more keeping parts of ourselves separate from the love of God. Ash Wednesday and the ensuing season of Lent is an opportunity to realign our lives with our faith. First we must be willing to identify and bring before God what shifts us out of alignment to begin with.

Reading

Matthew 6:1-6,16-21

'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. '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. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. '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. 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.

'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. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, 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. 'Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Silence. You are invited to give yourself a moment to be with the Scripture you just read. Let it sink in and settle a bit.

At this time you may choose to pull up Bishop Brian's Ash Wednesday homily on your computer or phone and listen. You may want to jot down a few thoughts of your own about the Scripture, Ash Wednesday, and the beginning of your Lent.

Homily

The Rt. Reverend Brian Cole

Prayers for Soil and Our Souls

You are invited to place your bowl before you and place your hands within the soil and simply hold your hands there as you hear Bishop Brian pray with you or you may read the prayer silently or aloud yourself.

Gracious God, we bring before you your creation. Bless this gathered earth which you deemed good at the beginning of time. Soil which we shall return to at the end of our earthly days- earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust. Loving God, send your Spirit once again to create in us a clean heart and renew a right spirit within us. Churn the soil of our soul so that we may cast away all that doesn't serve you. Just as soil reminds us of our inevitable death, may we also be reminded that our death is hidden in the everlasting life of Jesus. May we use these lenten days to align our heart, mind, words and actions with the love of your Son Jesus. *Amen.*

Silence. You are invited to hold a moment of silence after listening to Bishop Brian's homily and prayer and give the words and experience time to settle within you before moving on with the liturgy.

Prayers for the People

Though you may be alone reading the prayers of the people, we continue to use “we” because many are praying together around the world today. Though we are not physically together, we are still very much a “we,” sisters and brothers in Christ.

Loving God, we hold in your healing presence those who suffer pain and ill-health; we pray for their families, friends and those who care for them. May they each know the deep peace of Christ. *Pause*

Loving God, be with us as we continue to navigate this pandemic. Offer your healing to all those suffering from COVID, all those caring for them, and all those grieving the loss of those who have died from the virus. Bless our medical staff with patience, strength, compassion and perseverance as they continue in their care for others. *Pause*

Loving God, we hold in your healing presence those who suffer in mind and spirit, and all who care for them. May they know the deep peace of Christ. *Pause*

Loving God, we hold in your healing presence those struggling to overcome addiction or abuse, those supporting and working with them, and all whose suffering has distanced them from those who love them. May they know the deep peace of Christ. *Pause*

Loving God, we hold in your healing presence those facing bereavement. We also pray for those who have died. May they know the deep peace of Christ. *Pause*

Loving God, we give you thanks for health restored and prayers answered. May they know the deep peace of Christ. *Pause*

Loving God, we hold in your healing presence the suffering people of our world, and the places where people are experiencing division, injustice, and violence. May we know the deep peace of Christ. *Pause*

Loving God, be with the leaders of our country and every country. Give them wise judgement to make equitable decisions and take right actions. May our leaders lead out of the deep peace of Christ. *Pause*

Loving God, you are above me. You are beneath. You are in air. You are in earth. You are beside me. You are within. O God of heaven, you have made your home on earth in the broken body of Creation. Kindle within me a love for you in all things. (Prayer written by J. Phillip Newell) *Pause*

Loving God, we hold before you the prayers arising now from our own spirits. May we know the deep peace of Christ. *Pause*

Holy, life giving Spirit, you dwell within our beings. Open the eyes of our hearts to hear the truth you guide us into and the courage to follow wherever you may lead. Breathe through us, renew and remake us in these lenten days. What we have been is past; what we shall be, through you, still awaits us. Lead us on. Take us with you. May our lives flow in union with you. Amen.

Dismissal

The world is too dangerous
and too beautiful for anything but love.
May my eyes be so blessed I see God in everyone.
My ears, so I hear the cry of the poor and oppressed.
May my hands be so blessed
that everything I touch is sacrament.
My lips, so I speak nothing but the truth with love.
May my feet be so blessed I run
to those who need help.
And may my heart be so opened,
so set on fire, that the love of Christ,
living in me, changes everything.
Thanks be to God.

Blessings on a holy Lent.

May you find the bowl of soil a blessing to you through these Lenten days.

May it remind you of the sacred soil of your soul that God churns within you.

May you have the strength and perseverance to take on the holy invitation of self-examination and repentance; prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and reading and meditating on God's holy Word.

Whichever practices you take on, may you find yourself dwelling closer to God and living more aligned with your faith. Through these practices may you discover the Spirit has met you and created in you a clean heart and renewed a right spirit within you.

May Easter morning truly be an experience of joy and reconciliation with God.