

## **At Home Resources for Ash Wednesday**



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### **Opening Prayers**

From Dust we came,  
to dust we will return  
We belong to God  
We gather in penitence,  
we gather in confidence  
We belong to God  
At the beginning of Lent,  
At every moment of our lives  
We belong to God

Light of true light,  
Truth of deepest truth,  
we find peace in your perfection  
and courage in your strength.  
You offer us wisdom in your Word  
and hope in your mercy.  
You are the redeemer of all things and all times.  
With humble hearts, we worship you,  
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,  
our Creator, Saviour, and Guide,  
one God, now and forever.

Loving and everlasting God,  
nothing is beyond the reach of your love.  
You offer forgiveness to all who turn to you in confession.

Forgive me the words I failed to speak  
and the words I should not have spoken.  
Forgive me the good I failed to do  
and the evil I have done.  
Forgive me the love I refused to offer  
and the grudges I have held on to.  
Create in me a clean heart, O Lord.  
Forgive my mistakes and misjudgments,  
amend who I am,  
and direct who I can become with your love;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen

### **Prayer for Understanding**

Holy God, calm our hearts and minds, and create within us a quiet space where we can attend to your Word. Through the work of your Spirit, may we see you more clearly, love you more dearly, and follow you more nearly day by day. Amen

## **Scripture Readings**

### **Joel 2:1-2, 12-17**

Blow the trumpet in Zion;  
    sound the alarm on my holy mountain!  
Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble,  
    for the day of the Lord is coming, it is near—  
<sup>2</sup>a day of darkness and gloom,  
    a day of clouds and thick darkness!  
Like blackness spread upon the mountains,  
    a great and powerful army comes;  
their like has never been from of old,  
    nor will be again after them  
    in ages to come.

<sup>12</sup>Yet even now, says the Lord,  
    return to me with all your heart,  
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;  
<sup>13</sup>    rend your hearts and not your clothing.

Return to the Lord your God,  
    for he is gracious and merciful,  
slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love,  
    and relenting from punishment.

<sup>14</sup>Who knows whether he will not turn and relent  
    and leave a blessing behind him,  
a grain offering and a drink offering  
    for the Lord your God?

<sup>15</sup>Blow the trumpet in Zion;  
    consecrate a fast;  
call a solemn assembly;

<sup>16</sup>    gather the people.  
Consecrate the congregation;  
    assemble the aged;  
gather the children,  
    even infants at the breast.

Let the bridegroom leave his room  
    and the bride her canopy.

<sup>17</sup>Between the vestibule and the altar,  
    let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep.  
Let them say, “Spare your people, O Lord,  
    and do not make your heritage a mockery,  
    a byword among the nations.

Why should it be said among the peoples,  
    ‘Where is their God?’ ”

## **Isaiah 58:1-12**

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. <sup>2</sup>Yet day after day they seek me and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness and did not forsake the ordinance of their God; they ask of me righteous judgments, they delight to draw near to God.

<sup>3</sup>“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. <sup>4</sup>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. <sup>5</sup>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? <sup>6</sup>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? <sup>7</sup>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?

<sup>8</sup>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 rear guard. <sup>9</sup>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, <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>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. <sup>12</sup>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.

## **Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21**

**6** “Beware of practicing your righteousness before others in order to be seen by them, for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

<sup>2</sup> “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. <sup>3</sup> But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, <sup>4</sup> so that your alms may be done in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

<sup>5</sup> “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. <sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>16</sup> “And whenever you fast, do not look somber, like the hypocrites, for they mark their faces to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. <sup>17</sup> But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, <sup>18</sup> 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.<sup>[a]</sup>

<sup>19</sup> “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust<sup>[b]</sup> consume and where thieves break in and steal, <sup>20</sup> but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust<sup>[c]</sup> consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

## **Meditation**

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

We often think about the frailty of life from the death side of things.

Either death comes to us as the natural progression of life; we are all getting older, and fragility becomes our close acquaintance, whether reluctantly or not.

Or death comes to us as a great disruption: the loved one gone far too soon, inexplicably before their time.

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

Which means the frailty of life, the dustiness of it, accompanies us just as much at the start as at the end.

Things are just as fragile at the start..

Consider this.

Biologically, your grandmother once carried you. That is, your maternal grandmother once carried the egg that would become you in her womb.

You see, a woman is born with all the eggs she'll ever have, which means that, if you think about it—all of us, in our preconception state, once resided in the womb of our maternal grandmother.

The egg that was once you—or at least genetically half of you—was with your mother when she was born, which means that the egg that you once were was nurtured in the womb of your maternal grandmother.

**The makings of you existed decades, lifetimes, before the you we know came to be.**

That is amazing.

It may be a earthy, perhaps too embodied or too feminine to appeal to you.

If that's the case, perhaps this will.

It comes from astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson. He was on the Late Show with Stephen Colbert one Friday night, and they were talking about the joy of babies, as two men are wont to do on a Friday night, and Neil deGrasse Tyson said this: "If you add up all the possible ways of being human, all combinations of the genome that would produce a human being, those of us who have ever been born are a triflingly small fraction of the total number of humans who could have ever been born. So the fact that any single human is ever born is basically a scientific miracle."

The fact that you were born—the specific combination of you, the makings of you which were once carried at least in part by your maternal grandmother—is a miracle. Life, indeed, is a miracle. A frail, wonderful, beautiful and fearsome miracle.

Wherever you are on that dust to dust journey, the miracle of you remains. Thanks be to God.

In the words of the Prophet Isaiah (58), speaking to and of the people Israel,

*May the Lord 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.*

If you wish, you may trace a small cross on your own hand with water or oil, or simply place your hand over your heart as you say:

*"I am dust, and to dust I shall return"*

## **Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession**

Holy and merciful God,  
we confess that the world is not as you created it to be.  
Hear our prayers for the world and for one another:

Human love is imperfect and often fails.  
Help us to love you with heart, mind, soul and strength,  
and to love our neighbors as ourselves in our words and our actions.  
Lord, in your mercy,  
**Hear our prayers.**

We have been deaf to your call to serve others.  
Strengthen us to reach out to those in need and share what we have to offer.  
Lord, in your mercy,  
**Hear our prayers.**

Anger, pride, and impatience hinder the life-giving relationships we long for. Restore our broken souls and mend hearts and homes in this suffering world.  
Lord, in your mercy,  
**Hear our prayers.**

All around us, selfishness, envy and greed cause harm to others  
and to the earth itself.  
Show us how to live with kindness and generosity in the world you love.  
Lord, in your mercy,  
**Hear our prayers.**

Each day prejudice and contempt for others cause violence and loss.  
Open our hearts with your Spirit to see every person as precious to you  
and find the face of Jesus in each one.  
Lord, in your mercy,  
**Hear our prayers.**

Earth, sea and sky ache under the impact of human actions.  
Fire and storm destroy homes and habitats.  
Move in us by your Spirit to change our ways  
and care for the earth you entrust to us.

These things we pray in the name of Jesus, our redeemer and friend who taught us to pray:

The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father, who art in heaven,  
Hallowed be thy Name.  
Thy Kingdom come.  
Thy will be done on earth,  
As it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,**

**As we forgive those  
who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
But deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
and the power, and the glory,  
For ever and ever. Amen**

## **Closing Blessing**

Let the Prayer of Saint Richard of Chichester guide you through this season of Lent:

He prayed:

Lord Jesus Christ, merciful redeemer, friend and brother,  
May we know thee more clearly,  
love thee more dearly,  
and follow thee more nearly day by day.

So may God grant you the heart to make this prayer your own.