

6. Ash Wednesday

For the Leader: Ash Wednesday is the first day of the liturgical season of Lent. On Ash Wednesday, ashes are worn as a sign of our willingness to repent. These ashes are made from the ash of the burnt, blessed palms from Palm Sunday of the previous year. In generations past, people were encouraged to abstain from meat for the whole of the Lenten season. Today, there are only two days of fasting and abstinence: Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. Fasting means that the amount of food we eat is considerably reduced. Abstinence means that we give up particular kinds of food or drink, for example meat and alcohol. Children and those who are elderly are exempt from fasting.

You will need:

- ▶ Eight children to read
- ▶ Three children to carry symbols to the sacred space

Sacred Space:

- ▶ Violet cloth
- ▶ Bible, open at Matthew 4:1-11
- ▶ Candle
- ▶ Cross/Crucifix
- ▶ A wilderness space containing some sand, twigs and stones
- ▶ Other items will be added to the sacred space during the service: a Trócaire Box, a prayer book and some sweets
- ▶ Ashes, if they are to be distributed

Opening Song: ♪ *Wilderness* (Track 35)

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

All: Amen.

Leader: Let us begin with a prayer to our Guardian Angel:

All: Angel sent by God to guide me,
be my light and walk beside me;
be my guardian and protect me;
on the paths of life direct me.
Amen.

Leader: We gather together today to celebrate Ash Wednesday. Ash Wednesday is the first day in the season of Lent. During Lent we remember that Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness, praying and fasting. Let us hear about his time there.

Reader 1: *A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew (4:1-11)*

The Holy Spirit led Jesus into the desert, so that the devil could test him. After Jesus had gone without eating for forty days and nights, he was very hungry. Then the devil came to him and said,

Reader 2: 'If you are God's Son, tell these stones to turn into bread.'

Reader 1: Jesus answered,

Reader 3: The Scriptures say: "No one can live only on food. People need every word that God has spoken."

Reader 1: Next, the devil took Jesus to the holy city and had him stand on the highest part of the temple. The devil said,

Reader 2: 'If you are God's Son, jump off. The Scriptures say: "God will give his angels orders about you. They will catch you in their arms, and you won't hurt your feet on the stones."'

Reader 1: Jesus answered,

Reader 3: The Scriptures also say, "Don't try to test the Lord your God!"

Reader 1: Finally, the devil took Jesus up on a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms on earth and their power. The devil said to him,

Reader 2: 'I will give all this to you, if you will bow down and worship me.'

Reader 1: Jesus answered,

Reader 3: 'Go away Satan! The Scriptures say: "Worship the Lord your God and serve only him."'

Reader 1: Then the devil left Jesus, and angels came to help him.

The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Leader: What Jesus did in the wilderness was very difficult. But he did not give up. As his followers, we want to follow his example during the season of Lent, and so we often make Lenten promises. But what promises should we make?

♪ *Play Reflective Music (Track 22)*

Reader 2: Our first promise should be to pray more than we usually do. *(Pause)*

Child holds up a prayer book and places it in the sacred space.

When will you pray? In the morning, on your way to school? In the afternoon, on your way home from school? At night, before you go to bed? Make your promise now, and ask God to help you. *(Pause)*

Reader 3: Our second promise should be to go without, or abstain from, something, like sweets or chocolate, or playing video games.

Child holds up some sweets and places them in the sacred space.

What will you abstain from? Is there something you like, but that you could do without? Make your promise now, and ask God to help you. *(Pause)*

Reader 4: Our third promise should be to give alms or to be charitable. Being charitable means using what we have to help people who are in need.

Child holds up a Trócaire box and places it in the sacred space.

Do you have a Trócaire box in your house? Can you put some money in it during Lent? Are there other ways that you can share with people who are in need? Make your promise now, and ask God to help you. *(Pause)*

Leader: It can be difficult to do all of these things, but we know that Jesus is there to help us, and we can support each other. Let us pray for the strength to turn away from sin, and to be faithful to the Gospel during these Lenten days. The response to each prayer is, 'Jesus in the wilderness, help us.'

All: Jesus in the wilderness, help us.

Reader 5: That we may turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel. *(Response)*

Reader 6: That we may remember that we are always in need of God's forgiveness. *(Response)*

Reader 7: That we may be strong enough to keep our Lenten promises. *(Response)*

Reader 8: Jesus in the wilderness, in those moments when we choose to do without and find it difficult, help us, strengthen us with thoughts of others who do without and have no choice.*

If ashes are being distributed as part of this service, now is the time to do so. If ashes are not being distributed as part of this prayer assembly, continue below.

Leader: Jesus, our friend,
As we make this Lenten journey, may we turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel.
May our eyes be open to the needs of others.
May our ears be open to their call and to your Word.
May our hearts be open to care for each other and to welcome you into our lives.
We make this prayer through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

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

All: Amen.

Closing Song: ♪ *The Way To Be (Track 28)*

* *Alive-O 6, Poster.*