

The Revd Canon Andrew Stead | *Canon Precentor*



LICHFIELD
CATHEDRAL

Wednesday 03 February 2021

Ash Wednesday – Beginning the journey through Lent together.

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of our observance of Lent. Traditionally, it is a day of solemnity and fasting. It is a day of invitation to face our own creatureliness and our mortality. It is also a day to contemplate God's infinite goodness and mercy.

At the heart of our worship on Ash Wednesday is a particular focus upon the rite of penitence and our approaching Our Lord in humility to seek his mercy and forgiveness. We come to Him in faith conscious of our own fallen humanity in search for his lovingkindness and grace.

Traditionally this is expressed liturgically by the mark of the cross being made upon the forehead of each worshipper, usually in Ash. It is from this ancient symbol of repentance, 'in sack cloth and ashes', that the day takes its name. In some places the Ashes are created for use in the service from the burning of the previous year's Palm Crosses and then mixed with a little oil so that they adhere to the person's head. In many churches this year it may not be practicable to use Palm Crosses in this way.

This year the practice of what is referred to as the Imposition of Ashes presents a particular challenge because of the necessity of social distancing and public health safety. However, this year, of all years, our mortality, which the rite brings to the fore, is perhaps more understood by more people than ever. The words of imposition, 'Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return. Turn away from sin and be faithful to Christ.' help us face up to our own mortality.

As a diocese and a Cathedral we would like people to consider taking part in the Ash Wednesday liturgy. Most churches in the diocese are currently closed for in-person worship, so we anticipate that many will be attending worship online. We would like to invite you to take part in the service, by making a cross on our own forehead with your thumb or additionally preparing in advance of the worship some ash which you can make the mark of the cross with. Bishop Michael has circulated with his letter accompanying this a form for Imposition of Ashes at home, which can be used either as part of an online service or standing on its own.

If you intend to make ash you will need to burn a palm cross or other suitable material. It is advised that you do this with extreme care and outside in a small container. Once the ash has been created it should be allowed to become cold and then it can be mixed before the worship with either a tiny drop of oil or a little water so that it will stick to your forehead.

The Cathedral will be live streaming its worship at both **1230 and 1930 on Ash Wednesday, 17th February**, and will incorporate the Imposition of Ashes into the service and will invite you to take part by making the sign of the cross on your forehead, with or without the ash. You will find a link to the live streamed services by clicking on the Together in Worship button on our website: www.lichfield-cathedral.org

Please do accept our invitation to begin our Lenten journey together.

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