
BACKGROUND

Ash Wednesday is the day in the church year where we mark the beginning of the season of Lent. During this season, we are all invited to reflect on the things in our lives that may be causing us to be distant from God and distant from others. Beginning around the 11th century, the Ash Wednesday service became a way for Christians to physically mark and remember the beginning of the season.

Historically, during the service, ashes are prepared from the palm fronds used during the Palm Sunday of the prior year as a way to point toward the Gospel message of the upcoming Easter. The ashes are mixed with oil and placed with the sign of the cross on the foreheads of the service participants and the words, "From dust you have come and to dust you will return," are shared with each person. This can be a startling statement to hear. However, the purpose is not to alarm but to remind us that we have been created by God and that it is God who holds us in life and in death.



Perhaps it is because of our increasingly virtual world, Ash Wednesday and the season of Lent become powerful opportunities to reconnect with our families, friends, our faith communities, and most importantly our Creator. The scent of the oil, the scratch of the ashes, and the sound of song and Word all provide us with different ways to feel and understand the significance of the season.

ASH WEDNESDAY ACTIVITY

Supplies needed: Labyrinth sheet, ashes or black paint, and the scripture reading listed below

For this activity, we will be using a labyrinth you can find on the page following the prayer. Christians have used labyrinths as a means to have a multi-sensory expression of prayer and contemplation. Labyrinths look like a maze but are different from a maze in the sense that it is not meant to be confusing, but rather to provide space and time to reflect and pray while traveling the path. We will be using our labyrinth as a way for families of all ages to participate in this activity.

Please gather around a table or other flat surface in your home. Place the labyrinth in the middle of the table or surface. Near to the paper, have prepared ashes or black paint available for use.

Designate one or more readers of the scripture passage Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21. Invite each person in your group to use their finger to "journey through the labyrinth." If your group has more than 4, invite two participants to journey the labyrinth together. Start by placing one finger at the beginning of the labyrinth and when the reader begins to read the scripture, trace your finger slowly through.

When each participant reaches the center of the labyrinth, the participant will then dip their thumb into the ashes or paint and make the sign of the cross in the middle of the labyrinth. Together all will say the refrain: From dust you came and to dust you will return. Pause between each of the four breaks after the refrains as the participant finishes tracing their finger through the rest of the labyrinth. When you finish your journeys, you may complete the activity with the prayer following the scripture passage.

SCRIPTURE & LABYRINTH REFRAIN: MATTHEW 6: 1-6, 16-21

Concerning Almsgiving

Reader: Beware of practicing 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.

Refrain

Together: From dust you came and to dust you will return.

Concerning Prayer

Reader: 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.

Refrain

Together: From dust you came and to dust you will return.

Concerning Fasting

Reader: And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others 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.

Refrain

Together: From dust you came and to dust you will return.

Concerning Treasures

Reader: 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 treasure 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.

Refrain

Together: From dust you came and to dust you will return.

PRAYER

Dear God of our whole selves,
As we journey through this season of Lent,
teach us how to give,
so that we can joyfully respond when you call us to serve.
Teach us how to pray,
so that we can be closer to you in all that we do throughout the day.
Teach us how to let go,
so nothing can stand in the way of our connection with you.
Teach us how to prepare,
so we can be ready to receive your love, wisdom, and blessing.
Help us to remember that in all ways we belong to you,
Amen.

Journey through the
LABYRINTH

