

Ash Wednesday (A) – 18 Feb. 2026

Joel 2:12–18; 2 Cor 5:20–6:2; Mt 6:1–6, 16–18

INTRODUCTION

A traveller once stopped at the edge of a desert and asked an old guide,

“How long will it take to cross?”

The guide replied, “Walk.”

“But how long?” the traveller insisted.

“Walk,” the guide repeated.

Only when the traveller began the journey did the guide finally say, “About forty days.”

Today, dear friends, we stand at the edge of a similar journey.

With Ash Wednesday we step into the desert of Lent—**forty days** set apart, not to escape life, but to rediscover its direction. These are days taken out of the rush of the year, taken out of habit and routine, so that God may act in us and through us.

Ash Wednesday reminds us of two truths we often forget:

Life is fragile. Time is precious.

Yet it also speaks a word of hope: **God is near, and now is the time of grace.**

As we begin this holy season, aware of the suffering of our world—especially of people affected by war, violence, and injustice—we ask God to turn our hearts back to him, so that we may become instruments of peace, compassion, and healing.

Let us therefore place ourselves honestly before the Lord and ask for his mercy.

PENITENTIAL ACT

Let us call to mind our need for God’s mercy:

Lord Jesus, you call us back when our hearts grow distant and distracted. **Lord, have mercy.**

Christ Jesus, you invite us to change our ways and trust in the Gospel. **Christ, have mercy.**

Lord Jesus, you see not only our actions but the intentions of our hearts. **Lord, have mercy.**

PRAYER OF ABSOLUTION

May the God of compassion,
who never tires of calling us back,
forgive us our sins,
heal what is wounded within us,
and lead us on the path of life everlasting. **Amen.**

COLLECT

Faithful and merciful God,
today you call us into a time of grace,
a time of turning, a time of honest renewal.
As we begin these forty days of Lent,
help us to recognise what truly matters before you.
Free us from what binds us and distracts us.

Open our hearts to your word,
our hands to the needs of others,
and our lives to your transforming love.

May this season prepare us
to celebrate the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection
with renewed faith and joyful hope.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

HOMILY – “*Return to Me with All Your Heart*”

A man once found an old compass in his grandfather's drawer. Curious, he took it on a hike. But no matter which way he turned, the needle seemed unreliable. Frustrated, he was about to throw it away when an elderly hiker said to him,

“The compass isn't broken. You're standing too close to metal. Step away, and it will point north again.”

Lent is God's way of saying to us: *step away*. Step away from whatever pulls your heart off course—noise, habits, distractions, false securities—so that your inner compass can once again point toward God. Ash Wednesday places that compass in our hands.

1. Ashes: truth without illusion

The first words we hear today are unsettling: “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” In a world that constantly tells us to stay young, look strong, and avoid limits, this sounds almost offensive. We

are taught to hide weakness, deny mortality, and keep death at a safe distance. Yet Ash Wednesday refuses to play along with that illusion. It tells us the truth—not to frighten us, but to free us.

There is a story of a CEO who, after surviving a serious heart attack, said, “For the first time in my life, I realised that the world will continue perfectly well without me.” That realisation changed him. He spent less time chasing success and more time nurturing relationships. Mortality, once acknowledged, reordered his priorities.

Ashes do the same. They remind us: *life is short, but therefore meaningful*. How we live matters.

2. “Return to me with all your heart” (Joel)

The prophet Joel does not say, “Improve yourselves” or “Try harder.” He says: “Return to me with all your heart.” Return implies that we already belong to God. Lent is not about earning God’s love; it is about **coming back to it**. Anecdote: A priest once asked a child in catechism class, “What is repentance?”

The child answered, “It’s when you’re going the wrong way

and you turn around.” Simple—and deeply theological. Repentance is not self-condemnation. It is reorientation. It is letting God realign our inner compass.

3. Saint Paul’s urgency: “Now is the time”

Saint Paul intensifies the message:

“Now is the acceptable time. Now is the day of salvation.”
Not when life calms down.
Not when we retire.
Not after Easter.
Now.

A man once said, “I’ll pray when I have more time.” Years later, looking back, he admitted, “Time never arrived—but excuses did.”

Lent interrupts our excuses. It insists that grace is not something we postpone. God meets us **in the present**, not in the ideal future we keep imagining.

4. Jesus and the danger of doing good for the wrong reason

In the Gospel, Jesus names three sacred practices: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. He does not criticise them; he

exposes a subtle danger—*performance*.

There is a well-known saying:

“The ego can turn even holiness into a mirror.”

Jesus knows how easily religious practices can become about recognition, control, or self-satisfaction. That is why he repeats one phrase again and again: “Your Father who sees in secret.”

God is not impressed by appearances. God looks at intention.

A monk was once asked why he prayed so quietly. He replied, “Because God is not hard of hearing—but my heart is.” Lent is about healing that heart.

5. Prayer, fasting, almsgiving: one path, three directions

These practices are not separate projects; they form one movement of love.

Prayer turns us toward God.

Almsgiving turns us toward others.

Fasting turns us inward—to freedom.

Fasting, especially, is often misunderstood. It is not about

dieting or proving discipline. At its core, fasting asks: *What controls me?*

Someone once said, “I tried fasting from food and realised how often I eat out of boredom, stress, or habit—not hunger.” That discovery is already grace.

True fasting creates space—space for God, space for compassion, space for listening. And if fasting does not make us gentler, more patient, more attentive to the poor, then it has missed its purpose.

6. Ashes are not the last word

The ashes we receive today come from burnt palms—the palms of triumph, now reduced to dust. That is no accident. It tells us: even our successes fade.

But it also tells us: **God can bring new life from what seems finished.**

The ashes are placed in the shape of a **cross**, not a circle or a line. That cross proclaims hope: our dust has been touched by Christ.

A gardener once said,

“The best soil is made from what has died.”

God does not waste our failures, our losses, our brokenness. In his hands, they become fertile ground.

There is a story of a violin teacher who told his student, “You don’t practise to avoid mistakes.

You practise so that mistakes no longer frighten you.”

Lent is like that. It is not about becoming flawless. It is about becoming **fearless before God**—honest, open, and willing to begin again.

As we walk these forty days, marked with ashes, may we not wear gloomy faces, but hopeful hearts. For the God who calls us back is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, rich in compassion.

Ash Wednesday tells us who we are: *dust*.

Lent tells us who God is: *faithful*.

And Easter will tell us where we are going: *life*.

“Create in us a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within us.” Amen.

Shorter HOMILY

– ***beginning and ending with a story, with anecdotes in between***

There is a story of a famous violinist who once played incognito in a busy subway station. People hurried past, barely noticing the music. Only a few stopped. Days later, the same musician filled a concert hall, and people paid large sums to hear him.

The music had not changed.

What changed was **the attention given to it**.

Ash Wednesday is God playing his music quietly in the middle of our busy lives. Lent invites us to stop, to listen, and to ask: *What have I been passing by too quickly?*

Central reflection

Today’s readings draw a clear line through the heart of Lent.

The prophet Joel cries out:
“Return to me with all your heart.”
Not halfway. Not outwardly. But **with the heart**.

Saint Paul makes it urgent:
“Now is the acceptable time. Now is the day of salvation.”
Not tomorrow. Not when life settles down. **Now**.

And Jesus, in the Gospel, speaks with gentle realism. He warns us that it is possible to do the *right things*—praying, fasting, giving—for the **wrong reasons**. He is not criticising these practices; he is purifying them.

Anecdote: A child once asked,
“Why do people give up chocolate for Lent?”
The mother replied, “To remember Jesus.”
The child thought for a moment and said,
“Then shouldn’t it make us kinder too?”

That question goes straight to the heart of the Gospel.

Prayer that does not change us,
fasting that does not free us,
almsgiving that does not make us compassionate—
miss the point.

The ashes we receive today tell the truth about us:
we are fragile, limited, dependent.
But they are traced in the shape of the **cross**, reminding us that our weakness is embraced by God’s mercy.

A monk once said,
“Lent is not about becoming someone else,
but about becoming who God already sees.”

If these forty days help us to pray more honestly,
to live more simply,
and to love more generously,
then Easter will not only be a feast we celebrate—
it will be a life we begin anew. Amen.

INVITATION TO PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

Dear sisters and brothers,
let us bring before the Lord not only bread and wine,
but also our desire for renewal,
trusting that God can transform what we place in his
hands.

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

Generous God,
your Son gave himself completely
for the life of the world.

As we offer these gifts of bread and wine,
receive also our efforts to return to you with sincere hearts.
May this sacrifice strengthen us
to live not for ourselves alone
but in love and service of others.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

PREFACE

Yes, it is truly right and just,
our duty and our salvation,
always and everywhere to give you thanks,
holy Father, almighty and eternal God.

For you call us in this season of Lent
to a life that is deeper than comfort,
truer than success,
and richer than possession.

Your Son Jesus revealed what real life is:
a life poured out in love.
He sought no honour,
yet lifted up the forgotten.
He possessed little,
yet made many rich in hope.
He accepted death itself,
and through it opened the way to life without end.

In your mercy you invite us once more
to walk the path of conversion,
so that through prayer, fasting, and charity
we may be renewed in heart and spirit.

And so, with angels and archangels,
and with all the saints who have gone before us,
we sing the hymn of your glory:
Holy, Holy, Holy...

EUCARISTIC PRAYER II

(Original text unchanged – only insertions provided)

**Insertion before the Epiclesis only for personal
meditation**

*Lord, as we stand at the beginning of this Lenten journey,
we ask you to send your Spirit not only upon these gifts,
but also upon us.*

*May the same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead
renew our hearts,*

*purify our intentions,
and draw us closer to you and to one another.*

(Epiclesis – unchanged)

(Institution Narrative – unchanged)

(Anamnesis – unchanged)

**Insertion after the Anamnesis only for personal
meditation**

*Remember, Lord,
that we are dust, yet dearly loved by you.
As we proclaim the death of your Son
and await his coming in glory,
strengthen us during these forty days
to live as people reconciled,
ready to forgive,
and eager to serve,
so that our lives may give witness
to the hope of the resurrection.*

INVITATION TO THE LORD'S PRAYER

Trusting in the mercy of God,
who always welcomes those who return to him,
let us pray with confidence as Jesus himself has taught us:

EMBOLISM

Deliver us, Lord, we pray, from every evil,
especially from hardened hearts and divided intentions.
Grant peace in our days,
that, sustained by your mercy,
we may walk this Lenten path with courage and hope
as we await the blessed fulfilment
of Christ's resurrection and our salvation.

PRAYER FOR PEACE

Lord Jesus Christ,
you are our peace.
Look not on our sins,
but on the faith of your people,

and grant us the peace that flows from conversion of heart—
peace within ourselves,
peace in our families and communities,
and peace in a world wounded by conflict and war.

INVITATION TO COMMUNION

Behold the Lamb of God,
who takes away the sins of the world.
Blessed are those who are called
to the supper of the Lamb.

MEDITATION AFTER COMMUNION

In the silence of this moment,
let us remember:
God has not asked us to be perfect,
only to be open.
May the Christ we have received
quietly shape our hearts
throughout these forty days.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Merciful God,
you have nourished us
with the Bread of Life
at the beginning of this Lenten journey.

May this sacrament strengthen us
to walk the path of conversion with perseverance.
Let your word guide us,
your Spirit sustain us,
and your love draw us ever closer
to you and to one another.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

FINAL BLESSING

May the Lord who calls you back to himself
walk with you in these days of conversion.
May he open your eyes to what truly matters,

steady your steps when the path is difficult,
and renew your hearts with hope.

And may almighty God bless you,
the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

DISMISSAL

Go in peace,
and let this Lenten journey
bear fruit in your life.

TAKE-HOME THOUGHT

Lent is not about doing more,
but about becoming more—
more attentive,
more compassionate,
more open to God.

Thursday after Ash Wednesday – 19 February 2026

Readings: Deut 30:15–20; Luke 9:22–25

INTRODUCTION

Imagine a young traveler, lost in a vast forest. Each path seemed tempting: one promised comfort, another safety, another treasure. Yet only one path led to a sunlit meadow, where life could flourish. The traveler hesitated, unsure which way to go, until a gentle voice whispered, “*Choose life.*” Suddenly, the way became clear.

Today, the Lord speaks the same words to each of us: “*I set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life.*” Lent is our forest, and every day is a path. The decisions we make—how we love, how we act, what we let go of—are the steps that lead us either toward life or away from it. Let us open our hearts to hear God’s gentle whisper and prepare to follow Christ on the path of true life.

PENITENTIAL ACT

Lord Jesus Christ, you call us to life and love.

Lord, have mercy.

Christ Jesus, you carry our burdens and call us to follow you. Christ, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, you give us strength to choose life every day.

Lord, have mercy.

PRAYER OF ABSOLUTION

May Almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and strengthen us to choose life and love in every moment.

All: Amen.

COLLECT

Lord our God, guide us on this Lenten journey. Inspire our hearts to renounce what hinders us, embrace what gives life, and walk in your ways with courage and joy. May our sacrifices lead us closer to you, and may our love reflect your mercy in the world. Through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

HOMILY: Choosing Life in Lent

A man once inherited a beautiful orchard. He spent all his days counting apples, fixing fences, and displaying the fruit to impress others. In doing so, he forgot to enjoy the orchard itself—to taste the apples, to walk under the trees, to breathe the fresh air. One day, a stranger came and said, “All the apples you counted cannot give you joy if your heart is empty.”

Jesus’ words today remind us of this truth: to gain the world but lose ourselves is folly. True life comes not from accumulation but from love and self-giving.

Moses, speaking to the people in today’s first reading, urges them: “Choose life, that you and your descendants may live.” These words are not just ancient advice—they speak directly to us in our homes, workplaces, and communities. Choosing life is choosing love: love for God, for our neighbours, and for ourselves. Lent calls us to practice this daily, asking in each moment: *“What is the most loving choice I can make here?”*

Jesus invites us to renounce ourselves, a call that runs counter to the culture around us. We are taught to indulge, to seek comfort, to place ourselves first. Yet self-renunciation is not about punishment; it is about freedom. Each time we let go of what binds us—anger, pride, greed, or fear—we make room for God’s love to shape our hearts. Just as Jesus faced the choice in Gethsemane to embrace God’s mission over personal safety, we too are asked to follow God’s way, even when it challenges our convenience or comfort.

Jesus warns us: “What gain is it for a person to win the whole world and to lose themselves?” Our soul—our truest self, made in God’s image—is precious. The world often lures us with status, wealth, and recognition, yet these can distract us from what truly matters. Lent invites us to examine what we cling to and to return to life in Christ, nurturing what is eternal over what is fleeting.

Following Christ is not a one-time act but a daily journey. Every morning offers the chance to take up our cross and

choose life. Every day, God provides us with the strength to follow, the grace to rise after we stumble, and the courage to love in small but meaningful ways. Think of the quiet heroes around you: a teacher, a nurse, a parent—people who give of themselves daily without recognition. Their lives mirror Christ's teaching: in giving, they find life. Lent calls us to mirror this, each day, in our own spheres.

Returning to our traveller in the forest: he only reached the sunlit meadow by choosing the right path. So too, in Christ, we find fullness of life not by hoarding or indulging, but by choosing love, renouncing what hinders us, and following Him each day. Lent is our forest; may our hearts follow the path of life, one step at a time.

INVITATION TO THE PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

Brothers and sisters, let us offer our gifts to the Lord, signs of our commitment to choose life and follow Christ in every aspect of our lives.

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

Lord, we offer these gifts of bread and wine, signs of our willingness to renounce what holds us back and to embrace life in you. May they strengthen us to follow your Son, carry our daily crosses, and live in love each day. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PREFACE

Truly it is right and just
to give you thanks always and everywhere,
holy Father, through our Lord Jesus Christ.

You have set before us the choice between life and death
and in your love you call us again and again
to choose life.

You give us not only commandments,
but the path that leads to life—
the way of love, of self-giving, and of faithfulness.

In this holy season of Lent
you invite us to examine our hearts

and to let go of all that separates us from you.

You teach us that true life
is found not in holding on, but in giving,
not in seeking ourselves,
but in following your Son on the way of the Cross.

Christ himself has walked this path.

He gave his life
so that we might have life in abundance.
In every choice for love,
in every quiet sacrifice of daily life,
you draw us closer to yourself
and prepare us for the joy of your eternal Kingdom.

Therefore, with grateful hearts, we thank you
and join our voices
with the Angels and Archangels,
with the Powers and Dominions,
and with all the choirs of heaven,
as we sing the hymn of your glory:

Holy, holy, holy ...

EUCARISTIC PRAYER II

Before Epiclesis for personal meditation only:

*Lord, send your Spirit upon us and upon these gifts.
Strengthen our hearts so that every choice we make—
every word, every action, every sacrifice—reflects your
love. May this Eucharist inspire us to daily renunciation for
the sake of life in Christ.*

[Original text of Eucharistic Prayer II continues]

After the Anamnesis for personal meditation only:

*Lord Jesus, we remember your sacrifice and resurrection.
May this bread and wine, your Body and Blood, nourish
our souls, so that we may embrace the way of love and
daily discipleship. Let our lives become living offerings,
showing that in giving ourselves for you, we truly gain life.*

INVITATION TO THE LORD'S PRAYER

With confidence and trust, let us turn to our loving Father, who knows our hearts and our needs, and pray as Jesus himself taught us:

EMBOLISM

Deliver us, Lord, from all that harms our souls, from every distraction, every temptation, and every burden that keeps us from following you fully. Keep us steadfast in faith, firm in hope, and alive in love, so that your Spirit may guide us each day along paths of mercy, justice, and true life.

PRAYER FOR PEACE

Lord Jesus, you alone are our Prince of Peace. You bring reconciliation where there is conflict, healing where there is hurt, and hope where there is despair. Strengthen our hearts to forgive as you forgive, to serve as you serve, and to become instruments of your peace in our families, communities, and the world. May your Spirit move through

us, that the peace of Christ may dwell in every heart.

All: Amen.

INVITATION TO COMMUNION

Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb.

All: Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.

MEDITATION AFTER COMMUNION

As we receive Christ in this Eucharist, let us remember: choosing life often means surrendering self-interest for love of God and neighbour. Lent calls us to daily acts of renunciation, kindness, and generosity. Let us leave this table renewed in our hearts, ready to follow Christ's path of life and love.

POST-COMMUNION PRAYER

Lord, may the grace of this sacrament guide us in our Lenten journey. Help us to take up our crosses with

courage, renounce what hinders us, and choose life in you, now and always. Through Christ our Lord. All: Amen.

FINAL BLESSING

May God, who calls us to life and love, bless you and keep you; may Christ Jesus guide your steps and give you courage; and may the Holy Spirit inspire you each day to choose life in all things.

All: Amen.

DISMISSAL

Go in peace, to choose life and follow Christ.

All: Thanks be to God.

TAKE-HOME THOUGHT

Every day, the Lord asks us: “*What will you choose?*” In love, in sacrifice, in kindness, and in faithfulness, may we always choose life.

Friday after Ash Wednesday (II) – 20 Feb. 2026

Is 58,1-9; Mt 9,14-15

INTRODUCTION

Some years ago, a teacher noticed that one of her students always came to school without lunch. One day she quietly placed an extra sandwich on his desk. The boy did not say a word—he simply smiled. Later, the teacher learned that the child went home and cut the sandwich in half to share it with his younger sister.

That teacher had fasted—not from food, but from indifference.

As we begin this Friday after Ash Wednesday, the Church invites us to rediscover what fasting truly means. The prophet Isaiah reminds us that God does not delight in empty rituals but in hearts that choose justice, mercy, and compassion. Jesus, in the Gospel, speaks of himself as the Bridegroom—his presence brings joy, yet his absence calls us to longing and conversion.

Today, as we also remember the World Day of Prayer, especially highlighting the hope and future of women

across the world, we come before God aware that our faith must be lived not only in prayer, but in love made visible. Let us now place ourselves honestly before the Lord.

PENITENTIAL ACT

Brothers and sisters, let us acknowledge our sins, and so prepare ourselves to celebrate these sacred mysteries.

Pause

Lord Jesus, you call us to fast from injustice and hardness of heart: Lord, have mercy.

Christ Jesus, you invite us to joyful fidelity as friends of the Bridegroom: Christ, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, you send us to heal, to share, and to set free: Lord, have mercy.

PRAYER OF ABSOLUTION

May almighty God have mercy on us,
forgive us our sins,
and lead us on the path of justice and compassion
to everlasting life. Amen.

COLLECT

God of truth and tenderness,
you look not at appearances but at the depths of the heart.
In this holy season, free us from empty observance
and shape within us a spirit of generosity and mercy.
May our fasting make room for justice,
our prayer open us to hope,
and our self-denial draw us closer to those in need.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

HOMILY

A traveller once asked a monk why the monastery gates were always open. The monk replied, “Because God never closes his door—and neither should we.”

That simple wisdom captures the heart of today’s readings.

Isaiah speaks forcefully against a religion that looks devout but turns its back on suffering. The people fast, pray, and bow their heads, yet ignore the hungry, the oppressed, and the broken. God’s response is clear: *That is not the fast I*

desire.

Jesus, in the Gospel, offers another image—a wedding feast. His presence brings joy, life, and celebration. Fasting, then, is not gloom for its own sake, but longing born of love. When the Bridegroom is taken away, hearts ache—and that ache becomes prayer.

Reflection

Many of us associate fasting with food. Yet today we are invited to ask deeper questions:

- What do I cling to that keeps me from loving freely?
- What habits make me unavailable to God or to others?

A woman once decided to fast from her phone for Lent. What surprised her was not how difficult it was—but how many people she truly *noticed* for the first time: a neighbour, a lonely colleague, her own child's questions. Her fasting became a feast of presence.

Isaiah insists that real fasting loosens chains, feeds the hungry, shelters the homeless, and clothes the naked. Jesus confirms this by living a faith that heals, includes,

and restores dignity. Fasting that does not lead to love is noise without meaning.

A candle once complained that it was being consumed. The flame replied, “Yes—but only by giving yourself do you give light.”

Lent invites us to burn gently, faithfully, so that others may see hope.

May our fasting create space for joy, our sacrifices awaken compassion, and our lives proclaim that the Bridegroom is worth waiting for.

INVITATION TO PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

Pray, brothers and sisters, that our sacrifice of conversion and compassion may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father.

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

Lord God,
receive these offerings,
signs of our desire to be renewed in heart and action.

May they remind us that worship without justice is empty,
and prayer without mercy is incomplete.
Transform these gifts—and us—
so that our lives may become a pleasing offering to you.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PREFACE

It is truly right and just,
our duty and our salvation,
always and everywhere to give you thanks,
Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God.
For you call us in this season of grace
to turn from what enslaves us
and to rediscover the joy of hearts made free.
You teach us that fasting pleases you
when it leads to justice,
that prayer delights you
when it opens us to mercy,
and that sacrifice bears fruit
when it becomes love for the poor.

As we journey toward Easter,
you shape us into a people of hope,
ready to welcome the Bridegroom with lives renewed.
And so, with angels and saints,
with women and men of every nation who work for peace,
we sing the hymn of your glory, as without end we acclaim:
Holy, Holy, Holy...

EUCARISTIC PRAYER II

(The original text of Eucharistic Prayer II remains entirely unchanged.)

*Insertion before the Epiclesis for personal mediation only:
Priest (before “You are indeed Holy, O Lord...”):*

As we gather around this altar,
we remember that your Spirit moves not only upon bread
and wine, but upon hearts willing to be changed.
May this offering carry with it our longing
to fast from injustice,
to hunger for righteousness,
and to thirst for your kingdom of peace.

Insertion after the Anamnesis (added paragraph) for personal meditation only:

Priest (after "We offer you, Lord, the Bread of life..."):

In this sacrifice of reconciliation,
teach us to recognize Christ
in the wounded, the forgotten, and the poor.
As we await his coming in glory,
may our lives proclaim his presence
through acts of mercy, courage, and hope.

(Eucharistic Prayer II continues unchanged.)

INVITATION TO THE LORD'S PRAYER

Trusting in the God who hears the cry of the poor
and who feeds his children with hope, let us pray with
confidence as the Lord himself has taught us:

EMBOLISM

Deliver us, Lord, we pray, from every evil,
especially from indifference and fear.
Grant peace in our days,
that, by the help of your mercy,

we may be free from sin
and eager to serve one another,
as we await the blessed hope
and the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

PRAYER FOR PEACE

Lord Jesus Christ,
you called yourself the Bridegroom of joy and peace.
Look not on our sins,
but on the faith of your Church,
and graciously grant her peace and unity
in accordance with your will.
Who live and reign for ever and ever. Amen.

INVITATION TO COMMUNION

Behold the Lamb of God,
who takes away the sin of the world.
Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb.
Lord, I am not worthy...

MEDITATION AFTER COMMUNION

In this sacred silence,
we remember that Christ has fed us
not only with bread,
but with the promise of a transformed life.
May the strength we receive here
become generosity in our hands,
kindness in our words,
and justice in our choices.

POST-COMMUNION PRAYER

God of compassion,
you have nourished us with the Bread of Life.
May this sacrament deepen our hunger
for what truly matters
and send us forth
to live the fast you desire—
a fast that heals, frees, and restores hope.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

FINAL BLESSING

May God, who calls you to justice, bless you.
May Christ, the Bridegroom, fill you with joy.
May the Holy Spirit guide you
in love made visible.
And may almighty God bless you,
the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

DISMISSAL

Go in peace,
glorifying the Lord
by lives of mercy and hope.
Thanks be to God.

TAKE-HOME THOUGHT

“The fast God desires is not an empty stomach,
but an open heart.” (cf. *Isaiah 58*)

Saturday after Ash Wednesday (II) – 21 Feb. 2026

Is 58,9-14; Lk 5,27-32

INTRODUCTION

A man once visited a doctor and proudly said, “I never get sick.”

The doctor smiled and replied, “That may be your greatest illness—you never come to be healed.”

Dear friends, Lent begins not with perfection but with honesty. Today’s readings remind us that God’s healing does not begin when we appear righteous, but when we admit our need. Levi, the tax collector, did not clean up his life before Jesus called him; he simply stood up and followed.

As we gather at this Eucharist, we come not as the flawless, but as those willing to be healed. This sacred season invites us to loosen our grip on old habits, hidden pride, and quiet injustices, so that mercy, reconciliation, and new life may take root.

Let us place ourselves before the Lord who says to each of us, “Follow me.”

PENITENTIAL ACT

The Lord calls us not away from sinners, but out of sin.

Let us acknowledge our need for mercy and prepare our hearts to receive healing.

- Lord Jesus, you call us even when others reject us:
Lord, have mercy.
- Christ Jesus, you share table with sinners and restore their dignity:
Christ, have mercy.
- Lord Jesus, you invite us to walk a new path of compassion and justice:
Lord, have mercy.

PRAYER OF ABSOLUTION

May the God of mercy,
who never tires of calling us back,
forgive us our sins,
heal what is wounded within us,
and lead us into lives of freedom and love,
through Christ our Lord. Amen.

COLLECT

God of patient compassion,
you look not at our past but at our possibility.
Free us from the habits that bind us
and from the judgments that harden our hearts.
Teach us to fast from injustice,
to feast on mercy,
and to follow your Son with undivided hearts.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever. Amen.

HOMILY

A teacher once asked her students to write the names of people they disliked on a piece of paper and carry it with them all day. By evening, the children complained of how heavy their pockets felt. The teacher said, "That weight is what you carry in your heart when you refuse mercy."

In today's Gospel, Jesus walks past Levi's tax booth. Levi is weighed down—not only by coins, but by shame, rejection, and the knowledge that others have written him off. And yet Jesus does not lecture him, threaten him, or test him. He simply says, "Follow me."

And Levi does something astonishing: he gets up. No excuses. No delay. No conditions. He leaves behind a life that gave him wealth but no peace.

There is a quiet warning here for the Pharisees—and for us. It is possible to obey the law and still miss love. It is possible to be religious and yet afraid of mercy. The Pharisees fasted, prayed, and followed the rules, but they could not rejoice when a sinner was healed.

We see this even today. A parishioner returns after years away, and instead of joy, there is suspicion. Someone struggles publicly, and instead of compassion, there is gossip. Lent challenges this attitude. Isaiah reminds us that the fast God desires is not finger-pointing, but loosening the bonds of injustice.

Jesus calls himself a doctor. A doctor does not wait for patients to heal themselves. He enters the sickness.

An old parish priest once said, “The Church is not a museum for saints, but a clinic for sinners.” Levi understood that—and so he threw a banquet, because mercy always leads to joy.

Let me end with another story. A man once asked God, “Why do you keep forgiving me?” God replied, “Because you keep getting up when I call.”

This Lent, may we have the courage to rise like Levi, to trust the call, and to allow ourselves to be healed.

INVITATION TO THE PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

Pray, brothers and sisters,
that our sacrifice of repentance and hope
may become a pleasing offering to God,
who calls sinners to new life.

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

God of mercy,
we place before you these gifts,
signs of our longing to be changed.
Receive not only bread and wine,
but our willingness to leave behind what imprisons us.
May this offering open our hearts
to the healing power of your love.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

PREFACE

It is truly right and just,
our duty and our salvation,
always and everywhere to give you thanks,
holy Father, almighty and eternal God.

For in this season of grace
you call us away from empty religion
and lead us into lives of mercy and truth.
You do not turn away from sinners,
but sit at table with them,

so that broken lives may be restored
and wounded hearts renewed.

Through fasting that frees the oppressed,
through prayer that opens our eyes,
and through generosity that heals division,
you shape us into a people of compassion.

And so, with angels and saints,
with all who have risen at your call,
we proclaim your glory
and sing without end: Holy, Holy, Holy...

EUCARISTIC PRAYER II

(The original text remains unchanged)

**Insertion BEFORE the Epiclesis for personal meditation
only:**

Lord, you gather at this table not the perfect,
but those willing to be transformed.
As once you called Levi from his place of compromise,
so now you call us from our fears, excuses, and half-
hearted faith.

Let this Eucharist be for us not a reward,
but a remedy.

(Original Epiclesis follows unchanged)

(Original Anamnesis follows unchanged)

***Insertion AFTER the Anamnesis for personal meditation
only:***

Remember, Lord,
that we are a people in need of healing.
Strengthen us to live what we celebrate,
to seek the lost, to forgive generously,
and to build communities where mercy is stronger than
judgment.

INVITATION TO THE LORD'S PRAYER

Jesus called God his Father
and taught sinners to do the same.
With trusting hearts, let us pray:

EMBOLISM

Deliver us, Lord, from every evil,
especially from the pride that blinds us
and the fear that keeps us from love.
Grant peace in our days, that, helped by your mercy,
we may be free from sin and courageous in compassion,
as we await the blessed hope
and the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

PRAYER FOR PEACE

Lord Jesus Christ, you did not avoid broken people
but made peace by drawing near.
Look not on our sins, but on the faith of your Church,
and graciously grant her peace and unity
in accordance with your will.
Who live and reign for ever and ever. Amen.

INVITATION TO COMMUNION

Behold the Lamb of God,
who takes away the sin of the world.
Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lord.

MEDITATION AFTER COMMUNION

Like Levi,
we have been invited to the table.
Not because we are well,
but because we are loved.
May this bread strengthen our steps
as we rise and follow.

POST-COMMUNION PRAYER

God of healing mercy,
you have fed us with the bread of life.
May this sacrament
draw us closer to your Son
and send us out renewed,
ready to walk the path of compassion and justice.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

FINAL BLESSING

May God, who calls sinners to repentance,
give you courage to rise and follow.

May Christ, the healer of hearts,
walk beside you on the road of mercy.

May the Holy Spirit strengthen you
to live what you have received.

And may almighty God bless you,
the Father, and the Son,  and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

DISMISSAL

Go in peace,
glorifying the Lord by your life.

TAKE-HOME THOUGHT

Jesus does not wait for us to become worthy.
He waits for us to stand up.