



Ash Wednesday: An At-Home Spiritual Practice

At Missiongathering, our 2022 Lenten theme is centered around discovering what is most important to us and learning what to let go of. We will use this time, from Ash Wednesday (March 2nd) to Easter (April 17th), as an opportunity to intentionally cultivate what we want to flourish and let go of that which gets in the way of whole living. This series is designed to create space for reflection and intention-setting for the weeks to come. It can be done with one person, or more than one. Our last series, “Whole-Being,” taught us how to become more mindful of the areas of our lives where we might need more care and compassion. This time will give you space to put that into practice. Have the freedom to adapt this practice to suit your needs.

Here are some things you’ll want to have on hand:

- Candle, two paper strips per person.
- Grab seeds, flowers, herbs, or another plant from your local nursery or store.
- A very small amount of neutral cooking oil (olive, vegetable, etc.).
- Pencil or pen
- Matches/lighter, a surface on which you can let a small piece of paper burn **and** very well-ventilated (or outdoor) area. If using a plate, you may want to put a layer of tin foil on top of it.
- You may also choose to put on some soft background music.

Candle Lighting and Prayerful Intention:

Eternal One, today we remember we are made from fragile, sacred dust. You molded us in your image, breathing through us the breath of life and love. Allow us to be fully present to this time spent in communion with you, our source. As we step into this season of darkness, cultivation, and stillness, we remember the transformation and growth that happens in such places. As we feel our way towards you, we trust that you will provide enough light to guide our path and

enough companionship to sustain us along the way. It is in your many names we pray, Amen.

Light the candle.

Letting Go

Call to Confession:

*On the **WHITE** piece of paper, spend a few moments writing down what you'd like to let go of during this season. It can be anything that separates you from God, loved ones, or even your best self. This may include thoughts, habits, ideas, resentments, or guilt. You can follow this pattern, or follow your heart:*

- God, help me find forgiveness for...
- God, help me break free from...
- God, help me release...

Words of Assurance:

As an act of release, (and if this is safe with your participants and living environment), burn the paper on which you wrote your confession. Place it on the plate or tin foil and allow it to burn to ash, while saying "Oh God, hear my/our prayers."*

**If you cannot safely burn paper, rip the paper into very small pieces.*

Blessing the Ashes:

Read this poem by Jan Richardson out loud or to yourself:

All those days
you felt like dust,
like dirt,
as if all you had to do
was turn your face
toward the wind
and be scattered
to the four corners

or swept away
by the smallest breath
as insubstantial—

did you not know
what the Holy One
can do with dust?

This is the day
we freely say
we are scorched.

This is the hour
we are marked
by what has made it
through the burning.
This is the moment
we ask for the blessing
that lives within
the ancient ashes,
that makes its home
inside the soil of
this sacred earth.

So let us be marked
not for sorrow.
And let us be marked
not for shame.
Let us be marked
not for false humility
or for thinking
we are less
than we are

but for claiming
what God can do
within the dust,
within the dirt,
within the stuff
of which the world
is made
and the stars that blaze
in our bones
and the galaxies that spiral
inside the smudge
we bear.

Imposition of Ashes:

The imposition of ashes is an ancient tradition in which we remember the fragility of life and the sacred invitation to seek forgiveness. In doing so, we intentionally open ourselves to God's love and life.

Lightly dip your finger into oil, then swirl into the ash. Using the ash, make the sign of the cross on the back of your hand or on your forehead. Do this with the love and tenderness God holds for you and say the words "Today I remember that I am dust, and to dust I shall return."*

**If you could not safely burn paper, use only the oil.*

Cultivating

Reading of Scripture:

Read Luke 13:6-9 out loud or to yourself:

Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. So he said to the gardener, 'See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?' He replied, 'Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"

Reflection:

This parable reminds us of the long, often mysterious journey of cultivation.

We may know what it feels like to be the gardener—turning the soil, longingly offering nourishment, with the hope and expectation that something new will come.

We may know what it is like to feel like the man—returning to the place hope was planted, and finding it has not yet created something good and sweet.

We may know what it feels like to be the fig tree—our worth measured by what we produce, or don't produce. Perhaps longing for something around us or within us to be broken open and prepared for something new.

Prompt for Journaling or Conversation: *What are you feeling called to cultivate in this next season of life? What do you long for? What do you hope for?*

Planting Intentions:

Engage in a mindful planting of the seeds or plant. Focus on each movement, the feel of the dirt under your fingers, and the small actions that will, with time, lead to new life. You can plant the seeds indoors or outdoors and both directions are below.

If you're planting in a cup: Write a prayer on a piece of paper. Tell God what you hope to cultivate during this season of Lent. This can be a short, one-word intention, a longer prayer, or anything in between. Wrap the paper around the cup and use stickers or tape to secure it to the cup. At the end, add a pinch of the blessed ash* to your cup. From dust we come, and to dust we shall return.

If you're planting outside: As you scatter the seeds in a sunny spot, say a prayer out loud or silently to yourself. Ask God for support as you cultivate with God. At the end, scatter the rest of the ash*. From dust we come, and to dust we shall return. (You can also write this prayer on a piece of paper and put it somewhere you'll see it each day).

Closing Meditation & Moment of Silence:

You can pray your own prayer or use the meditation below:

You're invited to settle into a comfortable position and take a few deep breaths. Read this meditation and sit for a few moments in silence.

Be still and know that I am God

Be still and know that I am

Be still and know that I

Be still and know that

Be still and know

Be still and

Be still

Be

Amen

[Extinguish the candle]