

Ash Wednesday Liturgy of the Word



Prayer Space:

Make sure that you have a focal point in the gym or library where you will gather. This is a solemn service. Have quiet music playing as students enter to create reflective atmosphere.

Prayer table:

- **purple** cloth on it.
- a large pillar **candle**,
- a **Bible (Book of the Gospels)**
- a simple wooden **cross** (2 twigs tied together)
- a vase of bare branches, or dried wheat
- NO flowers during Lent

Call to Prayer:

Leader:

Today is Ash Wednesday.

It is the first day of LENT.

Lent is a time for the friends of Jesus to prepare for Easter.

Easter is the time to celebrate how much God loves us and that God is the giver of life.

It is the most important feast that Christians celebrate.

During the 40 days of Lent, we prepare for Easter by taking time to be quiet in our hearts, by praying, by doing good deeds, by being forgiving and asking for forgiveness.

We will receive ashes on our foreheads today to remind us that we need to try to be more like Jesus.

Let us begin with the sign of our faith....In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...

(To be read by a staff member)

A reading from the Gospel of Luke (Luke 19:5)

One day, Jesus came into a town called Jericho, where a man named Zacchaeus lived.

Zacchaeus was a rich man who was well known in the area where he lived, but he was not liked by everyone because he was a tax collector.

Zacchaeus had heard all about Jesus and wanted very much to see what kind of person Jesus was. Jesus was walking with a crowd of people but Zacchaeus couldn't see him because he was very short. Suddenly, he had an idea! He ran ahead of the crowd and climbed a tree. Zacchaeus was waiting and watched closely as Jesus walked by. Suddenly, Jesus stopped, looked up at him and said: "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today."

Imagine how surprised Zacchaeus was! Jesus had called him by his name and wanted to be with him at his home. Jesus wanted him to be his friend.

Zacchaeus hurried down from the tree, welcomed Jesus into his house, served him dinner, and listened to every word he said. Zacchaeus was very happy to have Jesus in his home, but some people were angry that Jesus wanted to eat at Zacchaeus' house because they did not think that he was a good person.

Zacchaeus saw what kind of person Jesus was and he knew that Jesus loved him and wanted him in his circle of friends. Zacchaeus wanted to be friends with Jesus, but this meant that he would have to change and live the way Jesus lived. He said to Jesus: "I will be more loving from now on, I will give half of what I own to the poor. If I have cheated anyone, I will give back what I took and even more.

For Reflection (to be read by a teacher)

Zacchaeus made some choices:

- To be unfair to people in collecting taxes
- To see what kind of person Jesus was

Jesus called him by name:

- This is a sign of Jesus' love for him

Zacchaeus decided:

- To welcome Jesus into his home
- To pay back anyone he had cheated in the past
- To give half of what he owned to the poor
- To become Jesus' friend

Jesus' invitation to Zacchaeus and his response to Jesus is cause for reconciliation which leads to celebration. This is what Lent is about as we get ready for Easter.

Jesus helped Zacchaeus by loving him, by being his friend and by letting him know how important he was to God. Zacchaeus' heart was changed. He became more loving, kind, generous etc.

Jesus loved Zacchaeus before he changed and it was this love and friendship that caused him to change.

Invite the students to think about how they can be like Zacchaeus as they prepare for Easter during the season of Lent.

They can:

- change their ways
- do good for others
- give money to those in need
- welcome new friends into their groups
- try to be better behaved at home and school
- be prayerful
- etc

Remind students that as they receive ashes today to think about Jesus and his friend Zacchaeus who accepted Jesus into his heart and was happier because of Jesus' love and friendship.

Prayer before the distribution of ashes:

Lord, bless these ashes which we will use as the mark of our repentance. Lord, bless all those who ask for your forgiveness and bless all those who receive these ashes. May they keep this Lenten season in preparation for the joy of Easter. Amen

(play quiet music during this time to create a reflective atmosphere)

Distribute Ashes saying:

“Turn away from sin and be faithful to the gospel”

Pray the **Our Father**

Closing Hymn: **Here I am Lord**