

ASH WEDNESDAY

Holy God,

We come to you marked with ashes—smudged with mortality, stained with truth.

You tell us we are dust, and to dust we shall return.

Not to shame us, not to frighten us, but to free us.

Today we confess that we prefer polished faith.

We would rather skip to Easter lilies than kneel in the grit of repentance.

We would rather speak of glory than admit how tired, how complicit,
how broken we are.

But you meet us here—in the smudge, in the sorrow, in the honest naming.

God of the wilderness, Lent is not tidy work.

It is the dirty work of hope.

It is turning soil long hardened.

It is clearing stones from neglected ground.

It is trusting that what looks barren is not beyond redemption.

Give us courage to do this work.

Courage to examine our hearts without despair.

Courage to confess our sin without self-hatred.

Courage to change without needing applause.

When we feel the weight of ashes on our foreheads,
remind us they are traced in the shape of a cross.

Even dust is claimed by love.

Even repentance is held in grace.

As we fast, strip away what numbs us.

As we pray, unclutter our desires.

As we give, loosen our grip on what cannot save us.

Plant in us a stubborn hope—not naïve optimism,
but resurrection-rooted hope that believes you are already at work in the dark.
We are dust, yes—but dust breathed into by your Spirit.

Dust that can be remade.

Dust that can rise.

Walk with us through these forty days.

Do your quiet, holy, transformative work.

And when the time comes, bring forth in us something new—
something honest, something merciful, something alive.

In the name of Jesus Christ, who entered the wilderness and did not turn away,

Amen.

Journal Prompt We are invited into honest reflection, not performance.

Where in your life has the soil grown hard?

What have you been avoiding naming before God?

What might repentance look like—not as shame, but as hopeful turning?

If Lent is the “dirty work of hope,” what small, faithful practice is God inviting you into
during these forty days?

Write without censoring yourself.

Let the ashes remind you: you are dust, and you are deeply loved.