



MEMORANDUM

To: Priests, Deacons, Pastoral Leaders, Parishes, Schools, and Religious Houses

From: Reverend David J. Cirata

Re: Blessing of Throats, Ash Wednesday, and the Season of Lent 2021

Date: 15 January 2021

*You are merciful to all, O Lord,
and despise nothing that you have made.
You overlook people's sins, to bring them to repentance,
and you spare them, for you are the Lord our God.*

-Entrance Antiphon, Ash Wednesday

With the penitential season of Lent beginning on February 17 with the celebration of Ash Wednesday, it is hoped that this guidance may prove beneficial as you prepare the Lenten liturgies. Pastors/Administrators/Presbyteral Moderators & Chaplains are reminded to use their best prudent, practical, and pastoral judgment while planning and celebrating the Sacraments and liturgical rites.

BLESSING OF THROATS ON THE OPTIONAL MEMORIAL OF SAINT BLAISE, WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 2021

On Tuesday, January 12, 2021, Archbishop Leonard Blair (Chairman of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Committee on Divine Worship) issued a memo to all Bishops. The memo noted the option provided in the *Book of Blessings* in regards to the blessing of throats on the memorial of Saint Blaise,

1628. If, for pastoral reasons, each individual cannot be blessed in the manner described in no. 1627, for example when great numbers are gathered for the blessing or when the memorial of Saint Blaise occurs on a Sunday, a priest or deacon may give the blessing to all assembled by extending hands, without the crossed candles, over the people while saying the prayer of blessing. A Lay minister says the prayer proper to lay ministers without making the sign of the cross.

The notation concludes,

The current circumstances would certainly be considered a sufficient pastoral reason to avoid administration of the blessing to individuals in the usual manner, should there be any concern of danger due to the ongoing pandemic.

Therefore, if the blessing of throats is to be given this day, this option, or the customary manner (see *Book of Blessings*, no. 1627), may be used.

The *Book of Blessings* also indicates when the blessing is conferred,

1626. If the blessing is conferred during Mass, the blessing follows the homily and general intercessions, or, for pastoral reasons, the prayer of blessing may take the place of the final blessing of the Mass. When the blessing is given outside Mass, it is preceded by a brief celebration of the word of God. If the blessing is to be celebrated at Morning Prayer or Evening Prayer, it is given after the reading and responsory (and homily) and before the gospel canticle.

ASH WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2021: DISTRIBUTION OF ASHES

On Tuesday, January 12, 2021, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments published a *Note on Ash Wednesday: Distribution of Ashes in Time of Pandemic*. The note, signed by the Prefect, Robert Cardinal Sarah, says,

The Priest says the prayer for blessing the ashes. He sprinkles the ashes with holy water, without saying anything. Then he addresses all those present and only once says the formula as it appears in the Roman Missal, applying it to all in general: “Repent, and believe in the Gospel”, or “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return”.

The Priest then cleanses his hands, puts on a face mask, and distributes ashes to those who come to him or, if appropriate, he goes to those who are standing in their places. The priest takes the ashes and sprinkles them on the head of each one without saying anything.

PASTORAL NOTES:

- Pastors/Administrators/Presbyteral Moderators and Chaplains may adjust the Mass schedule this day as deemed necessary. The faithful should be reminded that Ash Wednesday is **not** a Holy Day of Obligation. Receiving ashes, while customary and laudable, is not an obligation of the faithful. Those who are at high risk, especially the elderly and those with pre-existing health conditions are to be strongly advised to refrain from Mass attendance out of concern for their own well-being and out of Christian charity for others.
- The blessing and imposition of ashes within Mass takes place after the Homily as is customary. The Penitential Act is omitted.

- The ordinary minister for imposing ashes is the Priest or Deacon. Where there is a genuine need, lay ministers may join the Priest (and Deacon, if present) in imposing ashes on the faithful.
- Ashes may not be self-imposed. A minister always imposes ashes.
- According to local circumstances, ashes may be distributed in the customary manner or in the manner described in the Note from the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. If the option of sprinkling ashes is chosen, the ashes are sprinkled on the crown (top) of each person's head.

Sprinkling ashes on the crown of the head is a customary practice in other parts of the world. In fact, numerous Popes have received/distributed ashes by this method as it recalls the biblical example of wearing sackcloth and ashes to atone for one's sinfulness.

- The faithful should keep their head erect without bowing.
 - The ashes are then sprinkled on the crown (top) of each person's head.
 - No words are spoken by anyone.
- If additional liturgies are needed to accommodate the faithful in light of reduced capacity in the church, the *Roman Missal* gives the option that the blessing and distribution of ashes may take place outside of Mass using the following order of service:
 - Entrance Antiphon, the Collect, and the readings with their chants as at Mass.
 - Homily, if the minister is a Priest or Deacon
 - Blessing and distribution of ashes. If led by a lay minister, ashes already blessed by a Priest or Deacon are used.
 - Universal Prayer
 - Blessing (if the minister is a Priest or Deacon)
 - Dismissal
- Priests, when invited, may distribute ashes to the homebound. Appropriate care should be taken for each visit, including proper sanitizing and safety protocols. Policies established by hospitals, nursing homes, or other facilities/institutions are to be followed in regards to visitation.

SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

The current guidelines pertaining to the Sacrament of Reconciliation remain in place. Pastors/Administrators/Presbyteral Moderators & Chaplains may schedule times for the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation using prudent, practical, and pastoral judgment in light of COVID-19 regulations.

- **The *Light is On*, originally scheduled for Wednesday, March 24, 2021 is suspended for this year.**

SEASON OF LENT

- Two Solemnities are celebrated during Lent this year:
 1. Friday, March 19, 2021 is the Solemnity of Saint Joseph, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Because the solemnity falls on a Friday of Lent, the law of abstinence does not apply this year. The *Code of Canon Law* says, “Abstinence from eating meat or some other food according to the prescripts of the conference of bishops is to be observed on every Friday of the year unless a Friday occurs on a day listed as a solemnity. Abstinence and fasting, however, are to be observed on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday” (Can. 1251).

Bishop Daniel Thomas will host a diocesan-wide celebration of Mass for the solemnity on this day (March 19) at 7:00pm at Rosary Cathedral in observance of the Year of Saint Joseph, recently announced by Pope Francis.
 2. Thursday, March 25, 2021 is the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord.
- Pastoral guidance regarding the liturgies of Holy Week will be forthcoming in the near future.

As we continue to minister to the faithful of the Diocese of Toledo, may Saint Joseph intercede for us and may we imitate his loving humility and obedience to the Lord.