

A Liturgy for Ash Wednesday Bread Making

Begin by gathering your supplies:

Four cups flour, bread or unbleached all purpose
1 teaspoon salt, kosher preferred
¼ teaspoon yeast, instant or active dry
1 ½ cups water, warm to the touch
1 large mixing bowl
a bowl scraper, if you have one
a light, damp tea towel
and your Bible

As you prepare your workspace, prepare your heart and mind

In Labor All Creation Groans by Bifrost Arts

Wait for the Lord by the Taize community

Slowly breathe and meditate on these words

Inhale: Remember you are dust

Exhale: and to dust you shall return

Genesis 3: 19

Measure the flour, yeast, and salt into your bowl, and continue meditative breathing.

Feel the texture and temperature of each element between your fingers,
the dry and parched flour, like dust or soil waiting to bubble back to life again.

Form a well in the center of the bowl and pause to pray:

*Almighty and everlasting God, **you hate nothing you have made***

and forgive the sins of all who are penitent:

*Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we,
worthily lamenting our sins may obtain of you, the God of all mercy,
perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

Pour your water into the well. With your fingers, slowly pull the flour bit by bit into the watery center. Thicken the water, rubbing out dry clumps of flour as they form. Contemplate on the feeling of these substances transforming within your hands, asking God to reveal God's presence with you in a new way through this day's bake.

As the water thickens, continue pulling in flour until the two mixtures are worked into one. Imagine God picking up dust and transforming it with the breath of life—from dust you came.

Now stop.

The work is not yet done—but it is not all yours to do.

Gently clean the dough off your hands with your bowl scraper, if you have one, and then with warm water. Cover your mixture with the damp towel and step away to a silent place.
Trust that transformation occurs when your hands and your heart are at rest.

A reading, while you wait:

Isaiah 58: 1-12

Here ends the reading.

Dear People of God:

The first Christians observed Holy Week and Easter with great devotion. It became the custom of the Church to prepare for the passion and resurrection by observing a season of penitence and fasting. This season of Lent provided a time for new converts to the faith to prepare for Baptism, and a time for all people to seek forgiveness of their sins in repentance and faith.

*I invite you to observe a holy Lent, a time of self-examination and repentance,
of prayer and fasting, of reading and meditating on God's holy Word.
In our emptiness, in our loneliness, in our lack, and in our longing,
in our deep hunger and thirst,
may we meet the love of the Lord, our maker and redeemer.*

Now pray aloud the words of Psalm 51:

*Have mercy on me, O God, according to your loving-kindness;
in your great compassion blot out my offenses.
Wash me through and through from my wickedness and cleanse me from my sin.
For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.
Against you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.
And so you are justified when you speak and upright in your judgment.
Indeed, I have been wicked from my birth, a sinner from my mother's womb.
For behold, you look for truth deep within me, and will make me understand wisdom secretly.
Purge me from my sin, and I shall be pure; wash me, and I shall be clean indeed.
Make me hear of joy and gladness, that the body you have broken may rejoice.
Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquities.
Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.
Cast me not away from your presence and take not your holy Spirit from me.
Give me the joy of your saving help again and sustain me with your bountiful Spirit.
I shall teach your ways to the wicked, and sinners shall return to you.
Deliver me from death, O God, and my tongue shall sing of your righteousness,
O God of my salvation.
Open my lips, O Lord, and my mouth shall proclaim your praise.
Had you desired it, I would have offered sacrifice, but you take no delight in burnt-offerings.
The sacrifice of God is a troubled spirit, a broken and contrite heart, o God, you will not despise.*

Now uncover your mixture once again and grip an edge firmly in your hand.
Stretch and fold and contemplate on the change that has occurred:

water flooding and softening the grain, bursting open its tightly wound but untapped strength.

Stretch the edge and fold it over the dough, rotate the bowl 90° and repeat.

As you build both elasticity and strength, pray in this way:

Inhale:

Stretch—Create | Fold—in me

Exhale:

Stretch—a clean heart | Fold—O God

Inhale:

Stretch—and renew | Fold—a right spirit

Exhale:

Stretch and Fold—within me.

Repeat three more times.

Cover your dough and let it rest at room temperature for 10-12 hours,
until we return for evening prayer tonight.

Remember: transformation occurs, even while this dough is at rest.

a benediction before you depart:

*Glory to God whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or
imagine: Glory to him from generation to generation in the Church, and in Christ Jesus
for ever and ever. Amen.*

Ephesians 3: 20, 21

Gather your dough, a bit of flour, a Dutch oven, sheet tray, or bread pan.

As you prepare your workspace, prepare your heart and mind.

Slowly breathe and meditate on these words:

Inhale—Give me the joy of your saving help again

Exhale—and sustain me with your bountiful Spirit

Psalms 51:13

As you flour your counter and pour out your dough, continue meditative breathing.
Marvel at its beauty and strength, the bubbles that signal new and growing life,
this dust brought to life by water and yeast, just as God breathes into fresh soil.
Smell the scent of fermentation, tangy and a little bit sweet.

Now pause to pray:
*O gracious light, pure brightness of the everliving Father in heaven,
O Jesus Christ, holy and blessed!*
*Now as we come to the setting of the sun, and our eyes behold the vesper light,
we sing your praises, O God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
You are worthy at all times to be praised by happy voices,
O Son of God, O Giver of Life, and to be glorified through all the worlds.*

Stretch and fold the dough four times more, back and front and side to side.

As you do so, pray this prayer:

Inhale:

Stretch—Worship | Fold—the Lord

Exhale:

Stretch—in the beauty | Fold—of his holiness

Inhale:

Stretch—let the whole | Fold—earth tremble

Exhale:

Stretch—before | Fold—him

Now gently poke your little blob, allow yourself the joy of just how fun it feels!
Once again your bread needs rest, her journey from dough to bread must be slow.
As she rests, she relaxes into her newfound strength. If you push her, she's apt to tear.

While she rests, turn on your oven and preheat to 450°F.
If you have a Dutch oven, preheat it too, but if not a tray will do.

A reading, while you wait:
Matthew 6: 1-6, 16-21
Here ends the reading.

And our Litany of Penitence:
Most holy and merciful Father:

*We confess to you and to one another, and to the whole communion of saints in heaven and on earth, that we have sinned by our own fault in thought, word, and deed;
by what we have done and by what we have left undone.*

*We have not loved you with our whole heart, and mind, and strength. We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We have not forgiven others, as we have been forgiven.
Have mercy on us, Lord.*

*We have been deaf to your call to serve, as Christ served us. We have not been true to the mind of Christ. We have grieved your Holy Spirit.
Have mercy on us, Lord.*

*We confess to you, Lord, all our past unfaithfulness:
the pride, hypocrisy, and impatience of our lives, We confess to you, Lord.*

*Our self-indulgent appetites and ways, and our exploitation of other people,
We confess to you, Lord.*

*Our anger at our own frustration and our envy of those more fortunate than ourselves,
We confess to you, Lord.*

*Our intemperate love of worldly goods and comforts, and our dishonesty in daily life and work,
We confess to you, Lord.*

*Our negligence in prayer and worship, and our failure to commend the faith that is in us,
We confess to you, Lord.*

Accept our repentance, Lord, for the wrongs we have done: for our blindness to human need and suffering, and our indifference to injustice and cruelty, Accept our repentance, Lord.

*For all false judgments, for uncharitable thoughts toward our neighbors, and for our prejudice and contempt toward those who differ from us,
Accept our repentance, Lord.*

*Restore us, good Lord, and let your anger depart from us,
Favorably hear us, for your mercy is great.*

Accomplish in us the work of your salvation, that we may show forth your glory in the world.

*By the cross and passion of your Son our Lord,
bring us with all your saints to the joy of his resurrection.*

Return to your bread, well rested now, and flip her belly up.
Stretch and fold four times once more, then fold her in half and tug tight.
Place her seam side down on, a piece of parchment if you have one, for one final rest.

Her strength must relax for this final push,
where she will grow with the last bit of energy she can muster,
before dying so that we might feast on her and find life.

Now step away to a quiet place.

Inhale and exhale with each line of this prayer:
Inhale: O Lord, show us your mercy
Exhale: and grant us your salvation.
Inhale: O Lord, save our nation,
Exhale: and guide us in the way of justice and truth.
Inhale: Clothe your ministers with righteousness,
Exhale: and make your people joyful.
Inhale: O Lord save your people
Exhale: and bless your beloved creation.
Inhale: Give peace in our time, O Lord,
Exhale: for only in You can we live in safety.
Inhale: Let not the needy be forgotten
Exhale: nor the hope of the poor be taken away.
Inhale: Create in us clean hearts, O God,
Exhale: and take not your Holy Spirit from us.

Repeat as many times as you must to trust these words are true
(your bread needs a half an hour, it's okay if you do too)

With a sharp knife or razor blade, slice deeply across the top.
You must provide direction for this final push of energy to go.

Now place her in the oven and spritz with a bit of water, then watch as she changes before
your eyes. Watch her grow and burp and relax (about 30 minutes)
then pull her out and hear her sing.

She'll crackle when the coolness meets the heat and her muscles tighten up once more.
When she's cooled completely, break her open and share with the ones you love.

*May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace in believing
through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Romans 15: 13