

ASH WEDNESDAY RITE High Mass Form

The revised rite of Ash Wednesday was published in the 1962 edition of the *Missale Romanum*.

PREPARATIONS

-the character of the day is penitential, thus:

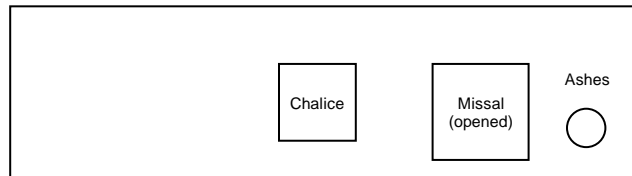
- the liturgical color is violet.
- the vestments should be sober, but of better quality.
- lace (a symbol of joy), should be omitted from the altar linens and vesture.¹
- flowers are forbidden on the altar and in the sanctuary.
- plainer items should be used (thurible, ewer and basin, etc.).²

-sacristy:

- amice, alb, violet stole, cincture, cope and biretta in vesting order.³
- thurible with lit charcoal and incense boat.

-altar: prepared as usual for High Mass with these additions:

- “The Missal, covered with violet, stands open on the Epistle-side...”⁴
- “...between the book and end of the altar, is a vessel containing the ashes...”⁵ “This vessel—‘of silver or any other ornamental material’⁶—is covered with a lid of similar material or with a violet veil”⁷ (cf. diagram of altar below).⁸



-sedilia: violet chasuble and maniple in vesting order.

-credence: as usual for High Mass⁹ (including the dish and towel¹⁰) with these additions:

- ewer and basin filled with warm water.

¹ Cf. *The Celebration of Mass: A Study of the Rubrics of the Roman Missal*, Rev. J.B. O'Connell (1964—reprinted by Preserving Christian Publications, 2007), p 448, ff 5.

² The practice of using more costly items for festal occasions and plainer ones for penitential days and Requiems is mentioned in the *Caeremoniale Episcoporum* (1886) and by rubricians, in particular regarding the quality of the altar crucifix and candles.

³ If a second priest will assist in distributing ashes, also prepare in the sacristy an additional surplice and violet stole.

⁴ *The Ceremonies of the Roman Rite Described*, Rev. Adrian Fortescue (1962—reprinted by St. Austin Press, 1996), p 266. It was the custom in Rome to enclose the missal in a cloth cover matching the color of the Mass and to use a similarly-colored pillow or missal stand with a colored veil. This is a laudatory practice and should be practiced if possible.

⁵ If C (or another priest distributing) does not have the *Memento* formula memorized, a card can be printed with the text (“*Memento homo quia pulvis es et in pulverem reverteris*”) and placed behind the vessel of ashes. It is held by an acolyte during the distribution.

⁶ Fortescue, p 266, ff 3: “M.R. [*Missale Romanum*] (cf. C.E. [*Caeremoniale Episcoporum*]; II, xviii, I).”

⁷ Fortescue, p 266. It is recommended to place a matching tray under this vessel to protect the altar cloth.

⁸ If a second priest will be distributing ashes simultaneously with C, then a second vessel should be prepared on the altar as the first.

⁹ If necessary, a secondary credence may be used for the ewer, basin, and tray with soap and towel.

¹⁰ For practical reasons the use of a ewer and basin is conceded to a priest for washing his hands after distributing the ashes (as it is impractical to do this with a cruet and small bowl). However, a priest must use a cruet and bowl during Mass because use of the ewer and basin for the *Lavabo* is a pontifical privilege.

- white towel on a tray.¹¹
- clean bar of soap on a tray.
- aspersion and aspergil.

-near the credence: thurible stand (if used).¹²

NOTE ABOUT SOLITA OSCULA

Despite the penitential character of the day, per the *Caeremoniale Episcoporum*¹³ (and rubricians) the ceremonial kisses¹⁴ are retained during the Ash Wednesday rite. As usual, the *solita oscula* are given before MC presents the incense spoon, thurible, aspergil or biretta to C, and upon receiving these items back.

SYNOPSIS OF THE CEREMONY

1. PROCESSION (as for High Mass)
2. BLESSING OF ASHES
 - *Exaudi nos, Domine.*
 - Four orations.
 - Blessing of incense.
 - Blessing of ashes first with holy water (while *Asperges* is said), then with incense.
3. DISTRIBUTION OF ASHES
 - C goes to center of predella.
 - Highest ranking cleric gives ashes to C.
 - Clerics receive ashes at predella.
 - Servers receive ashes at predella.
 - Schola members receive ashes at predella.
 - Laity receives ashes at rail.
4. WASHING OF C's HANDS AT EPISTLE SIDE
5. ORATION: CONCEDE NOBIS, DOMINE
6. HIGH MASS AS USUAL except:
 - Preparatory Prayers inclusive to *Oramus* are omitted.
 - Tract: all kneel when the verse *Adjuva nos* is said.
 - Postcommunion: additional bow is made during the Lenten season.

CEREMONY OF BLESSING OF THE ASHES

-the order of the procession is as for High Mass except C wears the cope and MC accompanies him on his right-hand side holding back the cope by the ophrey.¹⁵

-after the acolytes place their candles on the credence, Ac1 takes the aspersion and goes to his usual place while Ac2 positions himself *in plano* near the Epistle side of the foot and waits for MC to give him the veil and vessel's lid.

¹¹ This towel should be larger than the usual *Lavabo* towel; a 15 inch square linen towel (or medium-size white cotton towel) is ideal.

¹² It is recommended to place the thurible stand at least a foot away from the credence to safeguard the linen cloth.

¹³ Liber I, chap. XVIII, n. 16.

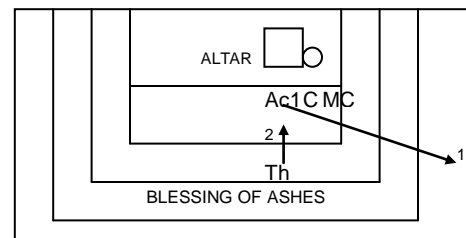
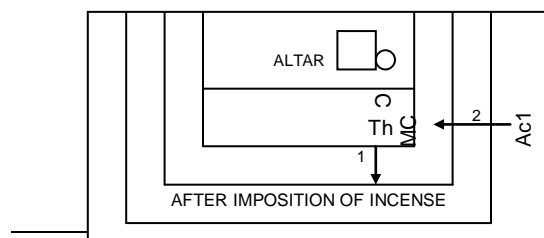
¹⁴ The ceremonial kisses which give solemnity and signify joy in the blessings received from the priest; cf. *Caeremoniale in Missa, Privata et Solemni*, Msgr. C. Callewaert (1941—reprinted by Romanitas Press), p 38

¹⁵ The paneled decoration or trim present on the open edges of the cope; it should be held back so that the decorative front side is revealed, not the lining.

- MC genuflects with C upon reaching the foot then goes *per longierium* to his Epistle side missal position.
- while MC removes the veil and lid from the ashes vessel, Ac2 ascends to the second altar step where he receives both items from MC, puts them on the credence, and returns to his normal position.
- meanwhile C ascends to the predella, kisses the altar and goes to the missal where MC points out *Exaudi nos, Domine* which C reads in a low voice with joined hands while the choir sings it.
- when the choir has finished singing *Exaudi nos, Domine*, C says at the missal and facing the altar “*Dominus vobiscum*” then the following four orations in the ferial tone.
- during the orations, all turn and bow towards the altar for each “*Oremus*”; MC does not hold the cope except when C blesses the ashes during which C also places his left hand on the altar.

BLESSING OF ASHES¹⁶

- after bowing at “*Oremus*” for the last oration, Th brings the thurible and boat¹⁷ to the Epistle side of the foot as for High Mass.
- after “*Amen*”, he ascends to the predella’s Epistle corner¹⁸ where incense is imposed as usual¹⁹ while MC holds back the cope.
- meanwhile AcI with the aspersory takes position near the Epistle side of the foot.
- after the incense has been blessed, retaining the thurible (in his right hand) and boat (in his left), Th descends to the front side of the second altar step (see the diagram above) to allow AcI to pass behind C.
- AcI ascends to the predella where he gives the aspersory to MC and then passes behind C to go to his left.
- MC presents the aspergil to C with *solita oscula* and with AcI holds back the cope while C sprinkles the ashes three times saying the entire antiphon *Asperges me* omitting the psalm.
- afterwards, MC receives the aspergil from C with *solita oscula* while AcI returns to MC’s side where he receives the aspersory, returns it to credence and resumes his normal position.
- then Th ascends and gives the thurible to MC and goes to C’s left-hand side.
- MC presents the thurible to C with *solita oscula* and with Th holds back the cope while C incenses the ashes with three singles fanned saying nothing.
- afterwards, MC receives the thurible from C with *solita oscula* while Th goes to MC to take the thurible which he puts aside²⁰ in preparation for receiving ashes.



¹⁶ This follows the Roman principle of performing the various preparatory blessings first (e.g., holy water—usually made prior—and blessed incense, which is always made at the moment when needed) before proceeding to the blessing of the sacramental (e.g., candles and ashes) or object (e.g., the catafalque during the Absolution). Note that only in the revised rite of Palm Sunday is this typical Roman order not followed.

¹⁷ If there is a boatbearer he will present the boat to MC and retrieve it as at High Mass.

¹⁸ Or second altar step if there is a lack of space on the predella.

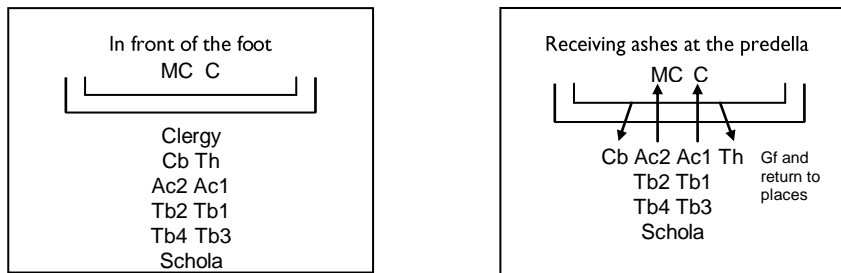
¹⁹ I.e., with MC holding the boat giving the spoon with *solita oscula* and saying to C, “*Benedicite Pater Reverende*”.

²⁰ If the sacristy is conveniently accessible from the sanctuary, Th may temporarily put the thurible there. Otherwise, a thurible stand can be temporarily set up near the credence (at least a foot away to protect the linen cover), or the thurible can be set in a safe place on the floor.

DISTRIBUTION OF ASHES

In receiving ashes, the clerics, servers and schola²¹ members all approach in the same manner:

- all form up in pairs in order of precedence (highest rank first), each pair genuflects upon reaching the foot, ascends to the predella and kneels to receive ashes.
- all clergy receive ashes from C in the shape of an equilateral cross where they would be tonsured (in the center of the head); non-clergy receive it on the forehead.
- deacons and priests receive their ashes wearing their stoles.
- upon receiving, the pair stands and turns inwards, each one descending to their respective side of the next pair at the foot, turn inwards and face the altar, whereupon the former and following pair (all four) genuflect simultaneously.
- the former pair returns to their places while the following pair repeats the previously described actions.
- the clergy sit upon returning to their places, but the servers stand.



-MC takes the vessel of ashes and accompanies C to the predella's center staying to C's left.

-meanwhile, the clergy, servers (Th and Cb,²² acolytes, then Tbs) and schola queue up in the center of the sanctuary in hierarchal order.

-the highest ranking cleric (not wearing his stole²³) genuflects at the foot, ascends to the predella and puts ashes in the center of C's bowed head in the form of an equilateral cross saying nothing.²⁴

-MC gives the vessel of ashes to C and holds the cope back while C distributes ashes to the clergy on their heads.

-the highest ranking cleric kneels first on the predella, puts on his stole, receives his ashes on his head, descends to the foot, genuflects and returns to his place;²⁵ the rest of the clergy then follow in pairs.

-when all the clergy have received ashes, MC kneels, receives ashes on his forehead, stands and ascends to C's right-hand side to hold back the cope.

-after the servers have received, MC descends with C to the foot, genuflects with him and accompanies him to the Epistle side of the Communion rail, remaining on C's right-hand side to assist with the cope.²⁶

²¹ I.e., a liturgical schola made up of men and boys wearing cassock and surplice.

²² If there is a Communion rail gate, Cb may close it after he has received his ashes.

²³ Fortescue, p 267; a server may hold this for him nearby until he kneels down.

²⁴ "If no other priest is present the celebrant stands¹, facing the altar, and puts the ashes on himself, in the form of a cross, saying nothing [1 SRC I Nov. 1931]."

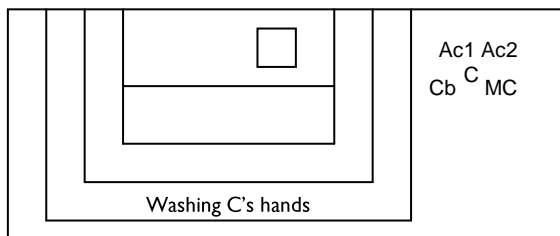
²⁵ If the highest-ranking cleric, presumably a priest, will not be assisting with the distribution, he may wash his hands in the sacristy's sacrarium during that time.

²⁶ Another server (e.g., Cb) may also accompany C on his left-hand side and hold the cope during the distribution at the rail. If necessary, this server can also hold the *Memento* card.

- while distributing at the rail, whenever C and MC reach the center, both must turn towards the altar, genuflect, and then continue to the other side.
- if there is a second priest to assist with the distribution of ashes, Ac1 accompanies him like MC with C.
- meanwhile, Th should prepare another set of charcoals for the beginning of Mass if needed; towards the end of the distribution he should be in his normal place in the sanctuary to take the remaining ashes from C to the sacristy.

WASHING C's HANDS

- towards the end of the distribution of ashes, the acolytes go to the credence where Ac1 retrieves the ewer and basin and Ac2 the tray with the towel and soap; both remain near the credence facing the nave.
- when the distribution is ended, still holding the cope, MC accompanies C to the foot and after genuflecting with him, leads him to the Epistle side of the sanctuary (*in plano*²⁷) where C gives the vessel of remaining ashes to MC who passes them to Th²⁸ to put in the sacristy.
- when C approaches, both acolytes bow to him, wash his hands, and bow again afterwards;²⁹ MC (and Cb on the left if available) holds back the cope while C washes his hands.



ORATION: CONCEDE NOBIS, DOMINE

- after C has washed his hands, MC accompanies him *per brevior* to the missal and indicates the oration, *Concede nobis, Domine*.
- meanwhile the acolytes return the washing items to the credence.
- immediately after the oration, MC leads C

“...straight to the sedilia, without a reverence to the cross...”³⁰

- MC removes the cope from C and gives it to Ac1 who returns it to the sacristy; MC then assists C with the maniple and chasuble as usual.
- meanwhile Cb and Ac2 takes the ewer and basin items³¹ and aspensory into the sacristy as these items are no longer needed for High Mass.
- afterwards, Cb and the acolytes return to their places.

MASS

High Mass is as usual with these exceptions:

- Preparatory Prayers are omitted inclusive of *Aufer a nobis* and *Oramus*; C goes immediately to the center of the predella to impose incense for the first incensation of the altar.³²

²⁷ This washing is purely for practical reasons and has no symbolic inference, hence why Fortescue directs that it should not be performed at the altar as during Mass.

²⁸ He should also take the vessel from the assisting priest if there is one.

²⁹ If another priest was also distributing ashes, following the rules of precedence he must wait to wash his hands after C (*cf.* Fortescue, p 268)—however, the acolytes should not bow to him before and after because he is not a sacred minister. Or the assisting priest may wash his hands in the sacrarium in the sacristy.

³⁰ Fortescue, p 268.

³¹ The water in the basin should be poured into the sacrarium as it contains residual of the blessed ashes.

³² Both the *Missale Romanum* and Fortescue denote that C does not kiss the altar before the Introit, most likely because he has already made this preliminary act before blessing the ashes.

- during the Collect,³³ after all have bowed for “*Oremus*”, MC signals all (except C) to kneel; all bow as usual for the Holy Name;³⁴ after “*Amen*”, MC signals all to stand.
- during the Tract, MC signals all to kneel when the verse, “*Adjuva nos...nomen tuum...*” is sung, but not when C says it at the missal.³⁵
- during the Postcommunion, MC repeats the steps as previously explained for the Collect. All remain kneeling for the special Lenten prayer over the people and bow their heads when C turns and sings facing the congregation, “*Humiliate capite vestra Deo*”; they remained bow during the prayer inclusive to “*per Dominum nostrum Jesum Christum...*”³⁶

³³ *M.R. (Rubricae Generales; X; 521, c)*; for an English translation, see *The Rubrics of the Roman Breviary and Missal* (reprinted by SSPX—available from Angelus Press), p 108, X; 521, c.

³⁴ Those kneeling are inferior ministers, clergy in choir and the faithful who usually bow when kneeling.

³⁵ Fortescue, p 268 and *M.R. (Rubricae Generales; X; 518, a)*; for the English translation, cf. *The Rubrics of the Roman Breviary and Missal*, p 107, X; 518, a.

³⁶ A separate bow is not made for the Holy Name since one is already bowing.