



ARCHDIOCESE OF KOTA KINABALU

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

RECEIVING ASHES ON ASH WEDNESDAY 17 Feb 2021

Peace be with you!

In just a week, Holy Lent begins on Ash Wednesday 17 February this year. Since it is not possible for the vast majority of our people in the Archdiocese of Kota Kinabalu to take part physically in the Mass or to receive the ashes at Mass, we have decided on the following:

1. Ash Wednesday will be celebrated on the actual day, 17 February 2021.

Whenever possible, the Mass with the Blessing and Distribution of Ashes in all parishes is to be live-streamed. Although Ash Wednesday is not a day of obligation, all Catholics are urged to watch the telecast Mass on that day when we begin the holy season of Lent to prepare for the greatest feast of the year – Easter.

2. Two ways of receiving the ashes for the faithful: A and B below, are proposed.

According to the local circumstances, each parish is to choose A or B, or even a combination of A & B.

A. For parishes where there is a well-organized system of stations/kampungs/zones headed by catechists/prayer-leaders:

Blessed Ashes to be sent to the homes.

Ashes will be blessed by the priest in a morning Mass on Ash Wednesday. The ashes destined for the stations shall then be collected by their respective catechists/prayer-leaders, and distributed to Catholic homes in their stations during the day.

At the main parish, Mass at a suitable time in the evening will be celebrated and live-streamed.

All at home are to watch the telecast Mass. Parishioners may watch telecast Mass from another church if their own parish does not do streaming.

At the same moment when the priest at the telecast Mass sprinkles ashes on the head of those at Mass, the head/representative at home will do the same with the blessed ashes they would have obtained earlier from their catechists/prayer-leaders.

As ashes are sprinkled on the crown of the head (and not traced on the forehead as traditionally done), the head/representative in the home may remain silent or he/she may say the same words as the priest at Mass: "Repent and believe in the Gospel".

The priest presiding the streamed Mass should allow a reasonable amount of time for those watching to complete the sprinkling of ashes at home before he proceeds on with the Mass.

The ashes blessed by the priest is a sacramental. Should any be left unused, it should be buried in the earth.

B. Distribution of ashes in parishes where it is not possible to send blessed ashes to all the people (in an urbanized area e.g.):

Preparation of ashes at home.

Each home is to prepare its own ashes. Ashes can be obtained by burning dry palm leaves kept from last/previous Palm Sundays, or from any dry palm leaves or any other leaves of plants. Only a small amount for the home is needed.

Sprinkling of Ashes during telecast Mass on Ash Wednesday.

At the main parish, at a suitable time in the evening of Ash Wednesday, Mass with the Blessing and Distribution of Ashes will be celebrated and live-streamed. Priests are reminded to bless more ashes as it may be needed later.

All at home are to watch the telecast Mass on Ash Wednesday. (You may watch Mass telecast of another parish if your own does not do streaming).

At the same moment when the priest at the telecast Mass sprinkles ashes on the head of those at the Mass, the head/representative at home will do the same with the prepared ashes. As ashes are sprinkled on the crown of the head (and not trace on the forehead as done traditionally), the head/representative may remain silent or he/she may say the same words as the priest at Mass: "Repent and believe in the Gospel".

The priest presiding the streamed Mass should give a reasonable amount of time for those watching to complete the sprinkling of ashes at home before he proceeds with the Mass.

The difference between A and B is that, in A, blessed ashes are used, in B, ashes used are not blessed.

Possibility of distributing blessed ashes in church after 18 February 2021.

Parishes that choose B should however do their best to distribute ashes blessed on Ash Wednesday in the parish on days after 18 February 2021 (the day after Ash Wednesday) when the present MCO is to end, and if the new government SOP would allow opening of churches after 18 February.

Each parish is to determine for herself the appropriate number of times needed to distribute ashes to cater adequately for the estimated number of parishioners who would wish to receive the blessed ashes in church. However, the distribution of ashes in church should be completed **BEFORE THE THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT**. Fridays are the most appropriate, but any days including Sundays may be used in this unusual time.

May the Lord bless us very specially this Lent during the pandemic and that all may experience a springtime of life this Easter!

Yours devotedly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'John Wong', with a large, stylized circular flourish underneath.

Archbishop John Wong