



What's What

A weekly communication that provides an opportunity for our faith community to grow together in faith.

Ash Wednesday

Ash Wednesday officially begins Lent and the Easter cycle on any date from February 4 to March 10, depending on the date of Easter. Ashes from burned palms saved from the previous year's Palm Sunday are placed on the forehead of parishioners. This custom of placing ashes on the heads of people and, originally, the wearing of sackcloth is an ancient penitential practice common among the Hebrew people (Jonah 3:5-9; Jeremiah 6:26, 25:34; Matthew 11:21). At first this ritual of ashes, along with its original scriptural meaning, was not directly connected with the beginning of Lent. As early as the 300s, it was adopted by local churches as part of their practice of temporarily excommunicating or expelling public sinners from the community. These people were guilty of public sins and scandals such as apostasy, heresy, murder, and adultery ("capital" sins).

By the 7th century, this custom had expanded in some churches into a public Ash Wednesday ritual. Sinners first confessed their sins privately. Then they were presented to the bishop and publicly enrolled in the ranks of penitents in preparation for absolution on Holy Thursday. After a laying on of

hands and imposition of ashes they were expelled from the congregation in imitation of the expulsion of Adam and Eve from paradise, with the reminder that death is the punishment for sin. "Remember, you are dust and to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:19). They lived apart from their families and from the rest of the parish for the 40 days of Lent (thus our word quarantine"). Dressed in sackcloth and ashes, they were identified as penitents in the congregation and sometimes on the steps of the church. Common penances required that these penitents abstain from meat, alcohol, bathing, haircuts, shaves, marriage relations, and business transactions.

A Prayer for Ash Wednesday

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, the all-holy one, who gives us life and all things. As we go about our lives, the press of our duties and activities often leads us to forget your presence and your love. We fall into sin and fail to live out the responsibilities that you have entrusted to those who were baptized into your Son.

In this holy season, help us to turn our minds and hearts

Depending on the diocese, some penances lasted for years and even a lifetime.

During the Middle Ages, emphasis was placed on personal rather than public sin. As a result, traditions of Ash Wednesday in a mitigated form were adopted by all adult members of the parish. Traditions similar to those in today's parishes were observed throughout the church by the 11th century. In recent years an alternate formula for the imposition of ashes emphasizes a more positive aspect of Lent: "Turn away from sin and be faithful to the gospel" (see Mark 1:15).

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back to you. Lead us into sincere repentance and renew our lives with your grace. Help us to remember that we are sinners, but even more, help us to remember your loving mercy.

As we live through this Ash Wednesday, may the crosses of ashes that mark our foreheads be a reminder to us and to those we meet that we belong to your Son. May our worship and prayer and penitence

Issue 10 —
Ash Wednesday

February 3, 2008

Things to talk about:

- What did you do with your palms from last Palm Sunday?
- How are you beginning Lent this year?
- What is the significance of ashes in expressing conversion?



this day be sustained throughout these 40 days of Lent. Bring us refreshed and renewed to the celebration of Christ's resurrection at Easter.

We ask this through your Son, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit for ever and ever. Amen.

By Lawrence E. Mick



Saint in the Spotlight — Saint Blase (d. 315)

February 3 is the memorial of St Blasé.

We know more about the devotion to St. Blase by Christians around the world than we know about the saint himself. His feast is observed as a holy day in some Eastern Churches. The Council of Oxford, in 1222, prohibited servile labor in England on Blase's feast day. The Germans and Slavs hold him in special honor and for decades many United States Catholics have sought the annual St. Blase blessing for their throats

We know that Bishop Blase was martyred in his episcopal city of Sebastea, Armenia, in 316. The legendary Acts of St. Blase were written 400 years later. According to them Blase was a good

bishop, working hard to encourage the spiritual and physical health of his people. Although the Edict of Toleration (311), granting freedom of worship in the Roman Empire, was already five years old, persecution still raged in Armenia. Blase was apparently forced to flee to the back country. There he lived as a hermit in solitude and prayer, but made friends with the wild animals. One day a group of hunters seeking wild animals for the amphitheater stumbled upon Blase's cave. They were first surprised and then frightened. The bishop was kneeling in prayer surrounded by patiently waiting wolves, lions and bears.

As the hunters hauled Blase off to prison, the legend has it, a mother came with her young son who had a fish bone lodged in his throat. At Blase's command the child was able to cough up the bone.

Agricolaus, governor of Cappadocia, tried to persuade Blase to sacrifice to pagan idols. The first time Blase refused, he was beaten. The next time he was suspended from a tree and his flesh torn with iron combs or rakes. (English wool combers, who used similar iron combs, took Blase as their patron. They could easily appreciate the agony the saint underwent.) Finally he was beheaded.

www.americancatholic.org/Features/SaintOfDay

Blessing of St. Blase

During the Middle Ages St Blase became very popular, being called upon when people were sick with diseases related to the throat. This has evolved into the tradition that on February 3 each year, the Church blesses throats.

This blessing which can take place during or after Mass, asks for God's healing and protection. The minister takes two blessed candles, places them in an X and puts them against a person's throat and recites this blessing:

Through the intercession of St. Blase,
bishop and martyr,
may God deliver you
from ailments of the throat
and from every other evil.
In the name of the Father,
and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Connections to Doctrine & Tradition

- It is a fact that we sin. We are called constantly to conversion to return to God (DeV31, 46; LG 8; CCC 1426, 1433, 1846-169, 1886-1889, 2608).
- We must return to our true purpose, which is to reveal Christ to the world (GS 24-25; CCC 1877).
- Lent is a time for us to turn back to God (SC 109-110; CIC 1249-1255; CCC 540, 1095, 1438)

CCC: *Catechism of the Catholic Church*; GS: *Gaudium et Spes*; NDC: *National Directory for Catechesis*; DeV: *Deei Verbum*; LG: *Lumen Gentium*; SC: *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. These documents can be found online at www.vatican.va or www.usccb.org.

"What's What" is a publication of the Youth Ministry Department of St Mary, Canandaigua, and St Bridget, Bloomfield. Our Youth Ministry Mission Statement [Draft]:

Building on the mission of our parishes to follow the way of Christ in our thoughts, words, and deeds, and to make Christ more fully present in all who live within our community, the Youth Ministry mission is to empower young people to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in the world today; to affirm the gifts of our youth and provide opportunities for young people to share their gifts with the larger community; and to meet the religious, spiritual and social needs of all youth with the committed leadership, guidance and support of our parish family, providing an opportunity for our entire faith community to grow together in Christian faith.

Want to know more?

Would you like to know more about Ash Wednesday? Check out the following books or websites for more information:

- Catholic Customs & Traditions, Greg Dues, Twenty-Third Publications, 2003
- <http://www.americancatholic.org/Newsletters/CU/ac0204.asp>
- <http://www.catholic.org/clife/lent/ashwed.php>

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