



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. 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

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be faithful to the gospel" (see Mark 1:15).
From Catholic Customs & Traditions, Greg Dues, Twenty-Third Publications, 2003, pg 73-74

40 Days of Scripture

Ash Wednesday Even Now (Joel 2:12-13)
2nd Day of Lent (Thursday) Original sin (Genesis 3:1-20)
3rd Day (Friday) Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:1-12)
4th Day (Saturday) Noah's Ark (Genesis 6:5-13, 9:8-11)
5th Day (Monday) Abraham and Isaac (Genesis 22:1-18)
6th Day (Tuesday) Jesus and Abraham (John 8:31-40)
7th Day (Wednesday) Moses and the 10 Commandments (Exodus 20:1-21)
8th Day (Thursday) The Covenant with Abraham and Moses (Jeremiah 31:31-33)
9th Day (Friday) A New Covenant (Luke 22:15-20)
10th Day (Saturday) 2 Great Commandments (Matthew 22:34-40)
11th Day (Monday) Forty Years in the Desert (Numbers 14:2-4, 10-11, 17-19, 33-34)
12th Day (Tuesday) Forty Days in the Desert (Luke 4:1-13)
13th Day (Wednesday) The Day of the Lord (Joel 2:10-16)
14th Day (Thursday) Jonas and the Whale (Jonah 1:1 - 4:11)
15th Day (Friday) Whom Shall I send? (Isaiah 6:8-10)
16th Day (Saturday) Trust and Rescue (Psalm 22)
17th Day (Monday) Prophetic Role of Jeremiah (Jer 1:4-8, 3:12-15)
18th Day (Tuesday) Story of Elijah (2 Kings 2:9-12)
19th Day (Wednesday) Story of Elisha (2 Kings 4:38-44)
20th Day (Thursday) Loaves and

Fishes (Mark 6:34-44)
21th Day (Friday) Gabriel and the Anointed One (Daniel 9:15-24)
22nd Day (Saturday) Anointing of David (1Sam. 16:1-13)
23rd Day (Monday) Anointing at Bethany (Matthew 26:6-13)
24th Day (Tuesday) John the Baptist (Luke 1:13-17, 80)
25th Day (Wednesday) Prophecy of New Order (Micah 4:1-7)
26th Day (Thursday) Fulfillment of all Prophecies (Luke 24:44-48)
27th Day (Friday) Transfiguration (Luke 9:28-36)
28th Day (Saturday) Entrance Into Jerusalem (Matt. 21:1-9)
29th Day (Monday) Zeal for your house consumes me (Ps 69:6-25)
30th Day (Tuesday) Driving the moneylenders from the temple (John 2:13-25)
31st Day (Wednesday) Judas (Matthew 26:14-25)
32nd Day (Thursday) The Innocent Victim (Isaiah 53:1-12)
33rd Day (Friday) Last Supper (Luke 22:14-20)
34th Day (Saturday) Agony in Garden (Matthew 26:36-46)
35th Day (Monday) Denial of Jesus (Mark 14:29-31 & 14:66-72)
36th Day (Tuesday) Crown of Thorns (Matt. 27:27 - Matt. 27:31)
37th Day (Wednesday) Scourging at the Pillar (John 19:1-5)
38th Day (Holy Thursday) The Two Thieves (Luke 23:32 - 43)
39th Day (Good Friday) On the Cross (Mat 27:35-50)
40th Day (Holy Saturday) Death Of Jesus (Matthew 27: 45-54)



Saint in the Spotlight — Saint Polycarp (d. 156)

February 23 is the memorial of St Polycarp.

Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna (modern Izmir, Turkey), disciple of St. John the Apostle and friend of St. Ignatius of Antioch was a revered Christian leader during the first half of the second century.

St. Ignatius, on his way to Rome to be martyred, visited Polycarp at Smyrna, and later at Troas wrote him a personal letter. The Asia Minor Churches recognized Polycarp's leadership by choosing him as a representative to discuss with Pope Anicetus the date of the Easter celebration in Rome—quite a controversy in the early Church.

Only one of the many letters written by Polycarp has been preserved, the one he wrote to the Church of Philippi, Ma-

cedonia.

At 86, Polycarp was led into the crowded Smyrna stadium to be burned alive. The flames did not harm him and he was finally killed by a dagger. The centurion ordered the saint's body burned. The "Acts" of Polycarp's martyrdom are the earliest preserved, fully reliable account of a Christian martyr's death. He died in 156.

Comment:

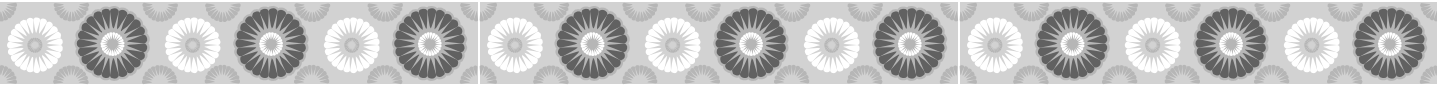
Polycarp was recognized as a Christian leader by all Asia Minor Christians—a strong fortress of faith and loyalty to Jesus Christ. His own strength emerged from his trust in God, even when events contradicted this trust. Living among pagans and under a government opposed to the new religion, he led and

fed his flock. Like the Good Shepherd, he laid down his life for his sheep and kept them from more persecution in Smyrna. He summarized his trust in God just before he died: "Father... I bless Thee, for having made me worthy of the day and the hour... ." (Martyrdom, Chapter 14).

Quote:

"Stand fast, therefore, in this conduct and follow the example of the Lord, 'firm and unchangeable in faith, lovers of the brotherhood, loving each other, united in truth,' helping each other with the mildness of the Lord, despising no man" (Polycarp, Letter to the Philippians).

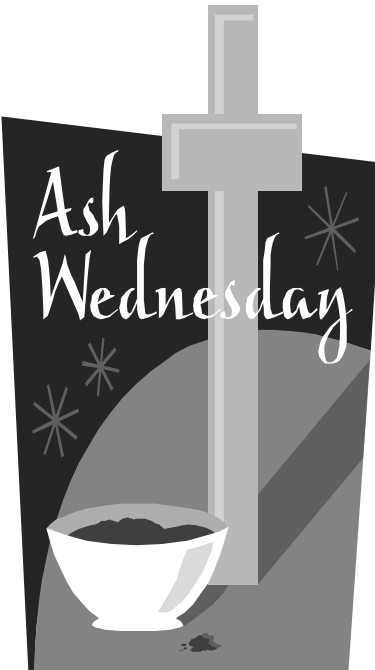
www.americancatholic.org/Features/SaintOfDay



Connections to Doctrine

- 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.



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>
- <http://www.catholic.org/clife/lent/ashwed.php>

These are just suggestions. In providing these we assume no responsibility for, nor do we necessarily endorse these books or websites, their content, or their sponsoring organizations.

"What's What" is a publication of the Youth Ministry Department of St Mary, Canandaigua, and St Bridget, Bloomfield.

Our Youth Ministry Mission Statement:

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.