

Question for the second week in February

Next week (on Ash Wednesday) will be the time to receive ashes on our foreheads. This week's question: **True or False?** The tradition of placing ashes on one's forehead goes back to the Hebrew Scriptures where the Israelites performed this practice as an outward sign of repentance.

See the answer following the daily readings and the Sunday lectionary posting.

Daily Readings for second week in February

February 8th:

Genesis 1:1-19
Psalm 104:1-2, 5-6, 10, 12, 24 and 35
Mark 6:53-56

February 9th:

Genesis 1:20—2:4
Psalm 8:4-9
Mark 7:1-13

February 10th:

Genesis 2:4-9, 15-17
Psalm 104:1-2, 27-30
Mark 7:14-23

February 11th:

Genesis 2:18-25
Psalm 128:1-5
Mark 7:24-30

February 12th:

Genesis 3:1-8
Psalm 32:1-2, 5-7
Mark 7:31-37

February 13th:

Genesis 3:9-24
Psalm 90:2-6, 12-13
Mark 8:1-10



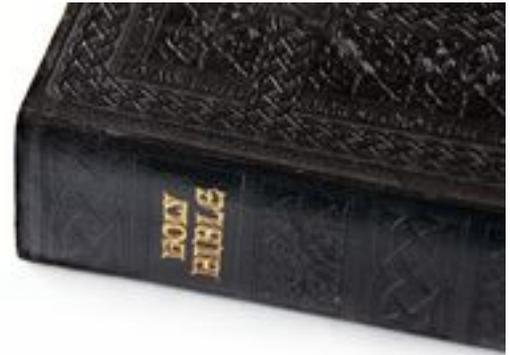
Sunday Reading for February 14th - 6th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Leviticus 13:1-2, 44-46 - Those who are unclean due to leprosy shall be kept isolated.

Psalms 32:1-2, 5, 11 - "I turn to you, Lord, in time of trouble, and you fill me with the joy of salvation."

1 Corinthians 10:31—11:1 - Be imitators of Paul, as Paul is of Christ. Do everything for the glory of God.

Mark 1:40-45 - A leper asks Jesus for healing from his disease, which Jesus grants. He then tells the healed leper to tell no one, but the man praises Jesus to the point that Jesus must hide from the crowds who flocked to see Jesus, the healer.



This week's answer

This answer is YES and NO! **Ash Wednesday** itself is strictly a Christian tradition - especially the placing of the Sign of the Cross on one's forehead, which would not have been done by the Israelites. There is no mention of Ash Wednesday per se in the Bible, but there actually was a tradition in the Hebrew Scriptures of spreading ashes over one's entire body as a sign of sorrow for sin and the intent to repent.



Job (Job 42:3-6) repents "in dust and ashes," and Jeremiah calls for repentance by putting on sackcloth and ashes (Jeremiah 6:26). Daniel does the same with fasting, sackcloth and ashes (Daniel 9:3), praying to God for forgiveness. You can also find references to the practice of donning ashes in Numbers 19:9, 19:17; Jonah 3:6; and Esther 4:1. And there are a couple of New Testament references in Hebrews 9:13, Matthew 11:21 and Luke 10:13.

But back to the practice of Ash Wednesday: Church Fathers as early as the 3rd Century called for confession of sin to be accompanied by prayer and the external sign of ashes. And in 1091, Pope Urban II extended the practice to the whole Church to be performed each year on the first day of Lent or *Feria Quarta Cinerum*, Latin for Ash Wednesday.



Ash Wednesday begins the six-week observance of Lent, which culminates with Palm Sunday, Holy Week and Easter Sunday. Catholics do not eat meat on Ash Wednesday (or the Fridays in Lent) as a form of sacrifice, reminding us of the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus on the cross on Good Friday. We use Lent as a time of special prayer and repentance in anticipation of being ready to receive the Risen Christ on Easter Sunday.

Stay tuned for information about receiving ashes on **Ash Wednesday**.