

Name _____



Origins of Ashes

Directions: Read the passage about how Ash Wednesday began and how its practices changed through time. Then, answer the analysis questions that follow.

Ash Wednesday has been observed for over a thousand years, but its roots stretch even farther back to ancient times. In the early Church, people who had done serious wrongs would show sorrow by wearing rough clothes and covering themselves in ashes. This public act of repentance showed they wanted forgiveness and renewal. Over time, this idea expanded beyond a small group to include the entire Christian community. By the 11th century, priests began placing ashes in the shape of a cross on everyone's forehead to remind them that life is temporary and that people should turn their hearts toward God.

Today, many churches still burn palm leaves from the previous year's Palm Sunday to make the ashes. While traditions vary from country to country-some sprinkle ashes, others make crosses-the message remains the same: ashes symbolize humility, forgiveness, and the hope of spiritual renewal. Though centuries have passed, the ritual continues to invite reflection on how people can live with purpose, kindness, and gratitude.

Analysis Questions:

1. What was the original purpose of using ashes in early Christian traditions?
2. How did the practice of Ash Wednesday change over time?
3. Why do you think ashes were chosen as a symbol for this holy day?
4. What is one similarity between ancient and modern Ash Wednesday practices?
5. How does this tradition encourage people to reflect on their lives today?