

# Ash Wednesday & Valentine's Day

Faith Seeking Understanding

By

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This year Ash Wednesday and Valentine's Day fall on the same day – Wednesday February the 14<sup>th</sup>. At first glance you might think that these days are total opposites. Ash Wednesday as an official day of fasting that marks the beginning of Lent and Valentines a day of romantic dinners and chocolates!

But let us look a little closer to see what they might have in common. Legend tells us that St Valentine was a priest who was imprisoned in the third century for marrying couples against the will of the cruel Roman Emperor Claudius II. Valentine was encouraging and supporting these young lovers in their endeavours to start a married life together. Today Valentine's day is a day where love is celebrated in many ways across the world.

However, it is good to remember that Valentine's Day is not the only day we can draw on love. God's love is available to us non-stop 24 hours of every day of the year.

John's gospel expresses this beautifully: "For God so loved the world that He gave His Only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). This phrase is often referred to as "the Gospel in a nutshell". To stress how much God loved, John uses the phrase "God So loved", and with this love came a gift – God in human form. Jesus, God's only Son given as a final sacrifice for sins.

The tradition of marking the forehead with ash on Ash Wednesday relates to an ancient Jewish custom of dusting oneself with ash to show a sign of being sorry for wrongdoing. It was a public display of acknowledgment of sin and a sign that they were intending to turn themselves around and live in a manner that focussed more on God.

Whatever we choose to do, or not do, during our Lenten observances may we remember that with our strength of commitment to go without something or take up a new practice we are not doing anything to win the praise of others. At the heart of it all is the attitude that goes with our Lenten practices and an opportunity to deepen our relationship with God who reaches out to us with everlasting love.

On Ash Wednesday may we remember that we all have the love of God available to us that is greater than the love any valentine could ever give. May we turn our hearts toward God during Lent so that we may know this love to its full extent.

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John 3:16



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