

## Ash Wednesday

The origin of the custom of using ashes, either sprinkled or marked on the forehead, at the services on the first day of Lent, can be traced back to Pope Gregory the Great (around 600). The words based on the second part of Genesis 3.19 "You are dust, and to dust you shall return" have been used for centuries; more recently the words "Repent and believe in the good news" have been added "making explicit what is implicit" in Genesis.

In spite of this long history the ceremony has not been part of iconography. However it is represented by the French artist Charles de Groux (1825 – 1870). De Groux worked in a variety of media, always focusing on the disadvantaged and poor of his own time. While his work is classified as "social realism" it always has religious overtones and references. He was a strong influence on a number of younger artists, including van Gogh.

*Ash Wednesday* was painted in 1866.

