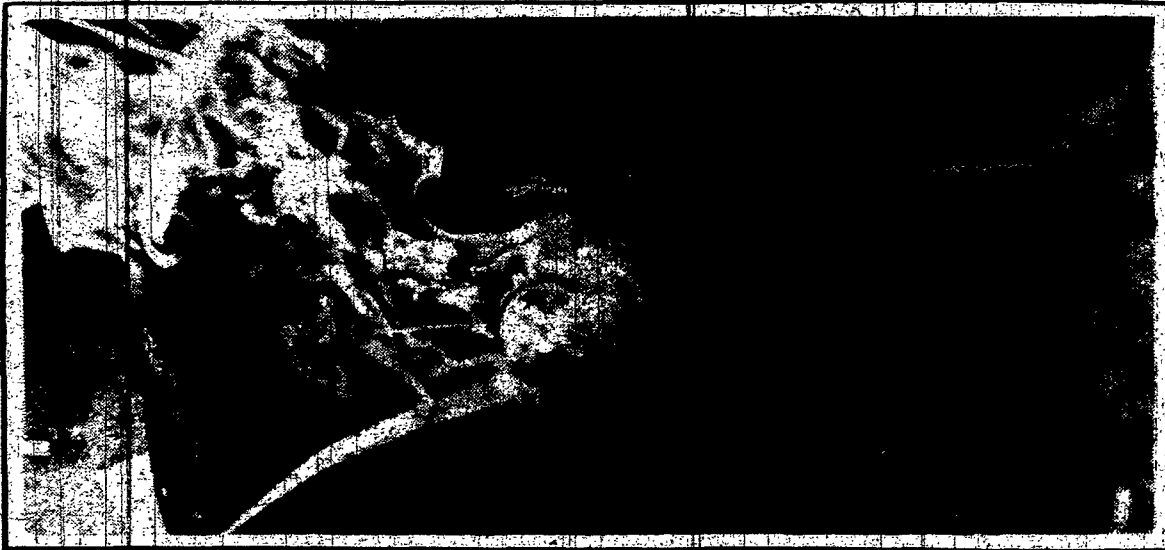




The ashes are those of last year's blessed palms.



Photos by  
Susan McKinney



The priest sign

# Remember, Y

Aelfric, an Anglo-Saxon homilist writing about 1,000 A.D., commends the practice.

"We read," he says, "in the books both in the Old Law and in the New that the men who repented of their sins bestrewed themselves with ashes and clothed their bodies with sackcloth. Now let us do this little at the beginning of our Lent that we strew ashes upon our heads to signify that we ought to repent of our sins during the Lenten fast."

These words seem to be the first indication of the Christian community using ashes as a sacramental.

But wearing ashes to connote repentance and spiritual cleansing is ancient in Jewish ritual, from which the Christian tradition is derived.

Scholars propose that the earliest wearing of ashes meant grief and mourning. References in the Old Testament and even in Homer's Iliad indicate the universality of the practice.

Some scholars point to a passage in

the Book of Numbers the Red Heifer (Num the ashes of the sacri mixed with water ha efficacy of purifying rite finds its echo in a Letter to the Hebrews of goats and bulls ashes of a heifer sar unto the cleansing much more will the bl through the Holy Spi unblemished unto C conscience from dead the living God?" (He

Earliest Christian w being worn as a sign and rituals exist wh sprinkling of ashes o

In the early Midd frequent practice to upon the ground on a with ashes. A priest holy water on the mar repentance before G

The words used by t these: