

Science and Digital Briefs

By Shopper Editor Dave Bunting



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[Hail to the Chief: One Great Article About Every U.S. President](#)

Take a trip through American history with this chronological collection featuring one fascinating thing to read about every person who has ever served as POTUS.

Forty-five people have served as President of the United States across 46 presidential administrations (Grover Cleveland served two non-consecutive terms—more on that below, plus the sordid sex scandal that nearly brought him down). We’ve curated one great story or essay about every single one of them. Impress your friends by getting to know obscure facts about lesser-known presidents like Martin Van Buren—the diminutive architect of the Democratic Party known as the “Little Magician”—or Rutherford B. Hayes—mostly forgotten in the U.S., but a legend in Paraguay. Or learn something new about giants like George Washington, who was surprisingly unpopular toward the end of his second term.



A man prays during Ash Wednesday services at St. Andrew's in New York City

(Carlo Allegri/Reuters)

Ash Wednesday- Feb. 22, 2023

We're too distracted to know what's most important. Ash Wednesday can help.

“Everything begins in mysticism and ends in politics.”

That’s a semi-famous quote from Charles Péguy, a French poet, who was born 150 years ago this month. Reflecting on his thinking, Robert Royal recently [explained](#) on his website *The Catholic Thing*: “What he meant is that every powerful movement begins as a spiritual force, and then is ‘incarnated’ in concrete action.”

Royal additionally pointed out that the context of the mysticism-politics quote is not as well known. “The interest, the question, the essential is that in each order, in each system, the mysticism not be devoured by the politics to which it gave birth.”

Royal reflects:

Many politicians privately mock this sort of idealism — either regarding it as impractical or using it for personal or partisan purposes.

But, says Péguy, it’s the *mystique* that provides whatever real life there may be in public affairs. And it’s the *mystique* that’s really practical, that gets something done.

There’s something in Péguy’s words that beckon us. Maybe especially as we watch the passing political scene in the United States today. New non-Trump presidential candidates are slowly stepping up on the Republican side. It remains a mystery what Democrats will do. But the more important question is what we will do. Each and every one of us. Because our lives are more than what’s in the news — balloons or anything else we are distracted by today.

The Covid shutdowns were an opportunity to consider a renewal of priorities, and yet so many of us declared that in Purell and masks and vaccines we trust. There’s reason to believe that our trust was misguided. Even Dr. Fauci admits as much. But a look to mysticism isn’t about political or medical recriminations. It’s about the essence of who we are and why we are here.

You are probably reading this around Ash Wednesday. For many Christians, it is a day of fasting and abstaining from meat. It begins a 40-day commitment to penance and renewed generosity — of remembering what it means to follow Jesus Christ — the Sermon on the Mount and all. Post-Covid, Post-Trump, post-*Roe v. Wade*, the season of Lent this year brings with it added challenges. How will each of us better reflect Christianity in our civic lives?

Speaking of *Roe* and the Supreme Court *Dobbs* decision that ended it in June: Politics is the absolute worst place to talk about and debate abortion. So much of the debate falls on women’s lives like salt into open wounds. Women have had abortions because they felt coerced, feeling that they have had no other options. Women have had abortions because they have been told that it is the responsible thing to do. Women have had abortions because doctors have been on a “search and destroy” mission, as described by one friend on the front lines of providing resources for real choice to pregnant women — doctors pushing the message that a poor Hispanic or black young unmarried woman has no business having a baby. This is the eugenics upon which the abortion industry was established in the first place.

Women are so much more resilient and amazing than abortion gives them credit for. When Rihanna unveiled her special guest at the Super Bowl half-time show this year — her unborn child — she made a cultural contribution that many a pro-lifer couldn’t help but cheer. I have no doubt that Rihanna and I disagree on much, but not about motherhood. She has talked about its life-changing power. There’s a mysticism about that.

In the Catholic tradition, the Catechism describes mysticism as the journey to an “ever more intimate union with Christ.” The Christian is called to continuing “spiritual progress.” That’s why we need an Ash Wednesday and a Lent every year, to reconsider who we are and where we are on that journey, in relationship to God.

Read [this week’s Bible Readings](#) for Ash Wednesday, Feb. 22, Jesus said: “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Matthew 6: 19- 21. NIV

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