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President Joe Biden greets visitors upon his departure from the White House on Ash Wednesd

President Joe Biden greets visitors upon his departure from the White House on Ash Wednesday in Washington March 2, 2022. (CNS photo/Kevin Lamarque, Reuters)



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Wrapping up his three-day visit to Poland Feb. 22, President Joe Biden attended Ash Wednesday Mass in his hotel room in Warsaw.

The Mass took place at the Marriott Hotel, where the U.S. president stayed during his trip to Poland's capital, and was celebrated by a Polish priest, Fr. Wieslaw Dawidowski.

"Today, I join Christians worldwide in observing Ash Wednesday," Biden wrote on Twitter. "The Lenten season is a time for reflection and discernment and an opportunity to recommit ourselves to God and to one another."

"May we continue to keep the faith and look with hopeful hearts towards Easter," the Catholic U.S. president added.

Social media users quickly observed a faded cross on the president's forehead on the pictures from the Feb. 22 Bucharest Nine (B9) summit held at the Presidential Palace in Warsaw.

In Poland, ashes are sprinkled over one's head, which left social media commentators surprised at the smear of ash on the president's forehead during the official meeting hosted by Polish President Andrzej Duda.

Dawidowski, an Augustinian, shared his experience of the Ash Wednesday Mass with Biden on his Facebook page.

"Today is Ash Wednesday. Even the most powerful in this world take ashes -- if they belong to the Catholic tradition," Dawidoswki said. "I had the honor today of placing ashes on the forehead of the US President Mr. Joe Biden."

The priest posted a photo of an improvised altar in a hotel room, the U.S. presidential seal, and himself with Biden.

"Everything took place in great secrecy, but now I can speak: in an improvised chapel, next to the President's apartment, we prayed for peace, the conversion of Russia and the light of the Holy Spirit for Mr. President," he wrote.

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Dawidowski was arrested and sentenced to six months in prison during the time of martial law in communist Poland for his involvement in anti-communist movement. Martial law existed between Dec. 13, 1981, and July 22, 1983.

Biden concluded his three-day visit to Poland, which followed a Feb. 20 surprise visit to Ukraine, where he met with President Volodymyr Zelensky in Kyiv, days before the Feb. 24 anniversary of Russia's full scale invasion of the country.

During his visit to Poland, in a conversation with Duda, Biden recalled his meeting with St. John Paul II, which took place in the Vatican, at the beginning of Biden's political career.

"At one point (John Paul II) said, 'Senator, please remember that I spoke to you as a Pole, not as the pope. Then I understood the power of Poland," Biden said, according to KAI news agency.

Biden's suprise visit to Kyiv and the scheduled visit to Poland, marking one year of war in Ukraine, has been hailed by commentators as one of the foreign policy highlights of Biden's presidency.