



Cover Photo Irises, Saint-Remy by Vincent van Gogh

Lent Companion **Daily Readings for Disciples of Jesus Christ**

Gary G. Hoag, Ph.D.

Ash Wednesday

C.S. Lewis: Patches of Godlight

“We—or at least I—shall not be able to adore God on the highest occasions if we have learned no habit of doing so on the lowest. At best, our faith and reason will tell us that He is adorable, but we shall not have found him so, not have “tasted and seen.”

Any patch of sunlight in a wood will show you something about the sun which you could never get from reading books on astronomy. These pure and spontaneous pleasures are “patches of Godlight” in the woods of our experience.”

C.S. Lewis in *Letters to Malcomb: Chiefly on Prayer* (Orlando: Harcourt, 1963) 91.

To adore God is to exalt Him in the highest while humbling ourselves to the lowest. That is our posture on Ash Wednesday: humble repentance. It's the posture called for in the heart of the Lord's Prayer. Father in Heaven, "forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us" ([Matthew 6:12](#)).

While the observance of Lent is optional, the three disciplines practiced in Lent are not. Thankfully in [Matthew 6](#) (among other texts), the instructions of Jesus are clear. "When you give alms...when you pray...when you fast..." In our Lenten journey, we will explore these texts and thoughts from saints through the centuries on them.

For now, let's start with adoration and repentance. This is the first step to learning new habits linked to giving, prayer, and fasting. My prayer is that we will see "patches of Godlight" together.

First Thursday of Lent

Thomas Merton: Fruitfulness of Silence

"The purest faith has to be tested by silence in which we listen for the unexpected, in which we are open to what we do not yet know, and in which we slowly and gradually prepare for the day when we will reach out to a new level of being with God...Here we see the creative power and fruitfulness of silence. Not only does the silence give us a chance to understand ourselves better, to get a truer and more balanced perspective on our own lives in relation to the lives of others...It helps us to concentrate on a purpose that really corresponds not only the deeper needs of our own being but also to God's intentions for us.

This is a really important point. When we live superficially, when we are always outside ourselves, never quite "with" ourselves, always divided and pulled in many directions by conflicting plans and projects, we find ourselves doing many things that we do not really want to do, saying things we do not really mean, needing things we do not really need, and exhausting ourselves for what we secretly realize to be worthless and without meaning in our lives: *Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.* ([Isaiah 55:2](#))

Thomas Merton (1915-1968) in *Love and Learning* (Toronto: McGraw Hill, 1979) 42-43.

As my wife and I discussed our approach to prayer and fasting this Lenten season, we have both felt drawn to carve out time daily for solitude. Merton writes much about the value of this practice for our faith and, in this text, celebrates the fruitfulness of silence: we learn more about God and ourselves.

Merton also brings to light how solitude becomes the pathway to real "rich" food. Want some? We invite you to join us in "listening carefully" this Lent. May we learn to discern the stuff in our lives that does not satisfy, so we can fast from it, and instead, partake of that which is good, delightful, and rich!

First Friday of Lent

Horace Smith: Charity from the Heart

"Beneficence may exist without benevolence, arising from a sense of duty, not from sympathy or compassion. It may be a charity of the hand rather than of the heart. There is an apparent beneficence which has no connection either with right principle or right feeling, as when we throw alms to a beggar, not to relieve him of his distress, but ourselves of his importunity of the pain of beholding him."

Horace Smith (1779-1849) English writer in *Day's Collacon* compiled and arranged by Edward Parsons Day (New York: IPPO, 1884) 66.

Since Lent is a time to practice Christian generosity, we must start by asking what God cares about linked to giving? He looks at what's going on inside us and desires to see cheerful giving motivated by love for our neighbor and those in need (cf. [John 10:25-37](#); [2 Corinthians 9:7](#)).

Let's evaluate our giving honestly. In Smith's terms, do we practice beneficence (from the hand) or benevolence (from the heart)? Do we give to assuage our guilt or to show God's love? Do we give to try to make problems go away? When we choose to extend charity from the heart, it does not result in God loving us more. What happens when we extend such divine charity? People see and feel God's love through us!

Father, fill our hearts with your love this Lent. Teach us to extend charity from the heart toward our neighbor and the needy around us. Help us serve those in distress, so we do not miss out on the opportunity to show the world your love and generosity. Do this we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

First Saturday of Lent

Dietrich Bonhoeffer: The Gift of Happy Certainty

“The fact that we can pray is not something to be taken for granted. It is true that prayer is a natural need of the human heart, but that does not give us any right before God... We pray to the God in whom we believe through Christ... We can know that God knows what we need before we ask for it. That gives our prayer the greatest confidence and a happy certainty. It is neither a formula nor the number of words but faith that reaches God in his fatherly heart, which has long known us. The proper prayer is not a deed, not an exercise, not a pious attitude, but the petition of a child to the heart of the Father.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) in *God is on the Cross: Reflections on Lent and Easter*, trans. by O.C. Dean, Jr., comp. and ed. by Jana Riess (Louisville: WJKP, 2012) 4.

As I explore prayer in silence this Lenten season, I am realizing that I can't do anything to be loved, because I am already fully known and deeply loved. My true self slowly comes into view as I discover that the Father is profoundly safe. In sweet communion, prayer appears as a gift enlivened with “happy certainty” and confidence. I learn to rest, and I find peace knowing that He knows my needs and I shall not want.

So why does He encourage me to ask for things I think I need? It's not because He does not know them, it's because I don't know Him. When I consider how loved I am, I get a glimpse of the heart of the Father, which causes my love for Him to grow (cf. [1 John 4:19](#)). That's what I am learning so far with regard to prayer this Lent. What a gift of happy certainty! What are you learning? Share it with someone today.

First Sunday of Lent

Henri Nouwen: Learning the Hidden Way

“Whether we give alms, pray, or fast, we are to do it in a hidden way, not to be praised by people but to

enter into closer communion with God. Lent is a time of returning to God. It is a time to confess how we keep looking for joy, peace, and satisfaction in many people and things surrounding us, without really finding what we desire. Only God can give us what we want...Lent is a time of refocusing, of reentering the place of truth and reclaiming our true identity.”

Henri Nouwen (1932-1996) from *Sabbatical Journey: The Diary of His Final Year* as recounted in *Lent and Easter Wisdom from Henri J.M. Nouwen*, comp. by Judy Bauer (Liguori: Liguori, 2005) 8.

On this, the first “feast day” of Lent (if you are new to Lenten practice, a “feast day” means a break from the 40 days of fasting), let us pause to reflect on why we are doing this. Why are we learning the hidden way? It’s not for others. It’s for us. It’s to help each of us recalibrate our lives to Christ.

For today’s feast, let’s read (“feast on”) Jesus’ instructions for us in [Matthew 6:1-18](#). In this text, I see Jesus reorienting giving, praying, and fasting *from* pathways for seeking human recognition (“give...pray...fast...to get praised by others”) *to* pathways for gaining heavenly reward (do this, as Nouwen said, to refocus, reenter the place of truth, and reclaim our true identity).

What do *you* see in this passage? Do you sense the Holy Spirit speaking to your heart as you read God’s Word? How do you give? How do you pray? How do you fast? Identify one thing you have learned about the hidden way today and put it into practice this week. Don’t talk to anyone else about it, but in your daily prayer time, talk to God about what you are learning.

First Monday of Lent

Augustine of Hippo: Conscience and Coffers

“Take a look at your heart. Everything you see in it that might sadden God, remove. God wants to come to you. Listen to Christ your Lord: “My Father and I will come to him and make our home with him” ([John 14:23](#)). That is God’s promise. If I were to tell you I was coming to stay with you, you would clean your house.

Now it is God who wants to come into your heart. Do you not hasten to purify it? How could he dwell with avarice? ...God has commanded you to clothe the naked. But avarice induces you to strip the one who is clothed...I am looking at your heart. What do you have in it? Have you filled your coffers but thrown away your conscience? ...Purify your heart.”

Augustine of Hippo (354-430) in *Sermons* 261.4 (PL 38,1203-4) as recounted in “Passions Transfigured, Thoughts Transcended” in *The Roots of Christian Mysticism* by Olivier Clément, 2.4.

Lent is a great time to clean house, both in our hearts and in our homes, so that God will dwell in them through faith. In Augustine’s thinking, giving to the poor, which in those days would have been put in coffers, is absolutely meaningless before God if our hearts, our consciences, are not right.

Where’s your conscience?

Before approaching any coffers this Lent, ask God today to show you areas of your heart in need of cleaning. *Come close to God, and God will come close to you. Wash your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, for your loyalty is divided between God and the world.* [James 4:8](#)

First Tuesday of Lent

Ignatius of Loyola: All Possible Energy

“It helps and profits in the spiritual life to abhor in its totality and not in part whatever the world loves and embraces, and to accept and desire with all possible energy whatever Christ our Lord has loved and embraced. Just as the men of the world, who follow the world, love and seek with such great diligence honors, fame, and esteem for a great name on earth, as the world teaches them, so those who proceed spiritually and truly follow Christ our Lord love and intensely desire everything opposite.”

Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) in “The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms” 101, as recounted in *Lent and Easter: Wisdom from St. Ignatius of Loyola*, comp. by James L. Connor (Liguori: Liguori, 2009) 64.

Letting go of the things of this world and embracing the things of Christ is precisely the function of fasting, prayer, and giving in Lent. Ignatius elsewhere calls Christ-followers to consider through meditation and contemplation what “inordinate attachments” or worldly affections must be cast aside in the journey of life (*Spiritual Exercises* 1; cf. [1 John 2:15](#)).

In modern terms, Ignatius is calling each of us to think about what we desire with “all possible energy” and ask ourselves how that compares with Christ and the world? We do this so that nothing thwarts the expression of His love through each of us. What do you desire? In what do you invest time? On what do you spend money? Would onlookers say your actions look like the world or appear as Christ?

Ignatius concludes his *Spiritual Exercises* by stating that “love ought to manifest itself in deeds rather than words” (230). Let’s pray to that end: *Father in heaven, we come to you in the name of Jesus asking You to graciously reveal to us our worldly affections by Your Holy Spirit, and help us replace them with the things that You love, so that our lives, in word and deed, make You known to the world. Amen.*

Second Wednesday of Lent

Billy Graham: Fruit of Travail

“Before three thousand people were brought into the Church on the day of Pentecost, the disciples had spent fifty days in prayer, fasting, and spiritual travail... John Knox travailed in prayer, and the Church in Scotland expanded into new life. John Wesley travailed in prayer, and the Methodist movement was born. Martin Luther travailed in prayer, and the Reformation was underway.

God desires that Christians be concerned and burdened for a lost world. If we pray this kind of prayer, an era of peace may come into the world and hordes of wickedness may be turned back. “As soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children” ([Isaiah 66:8](#)).”

Billy Graham in *The Secret of Happiness* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985) 36-37.

Why pray, fast, and travail in Lent? Through trailing saints God transforms hosts of sinners. I don’t have to convince people that our world today is filled with wickedness. I am suggesting that the answer for our world is not to legislate morality but rather to pray, fast, and travail persistently (cf. [Luke 18:1-8](#)). Do you pray for the lost to be locked up behind bars or, like Graham, do you pray for them to find life in Jesus?

Today marks the beginning of the second week of Lent. We have six weeks to go on our journey to the

cross. One thing I pray each of us discovers through prayer and fasting is the fruit of travail. Here's my Lenten challenge. Identify one lost soul for which you are willing to travail daily this Lent. Ask God to draw that person to Christ. Commit to sharing the Gospel with them if He opens the door for you.

Second Thursday of Lent

John Knox: Humble Earnestness

“During the troublous times of Scotland...late on a certain night, John Knox was seen to leave his study, and to pass from the house down into an enclosure behind it. He was followed by a friend; when, after a few moments of silence, his voice was heard as if in prayer. In another moment the accents deepened into intelligible words, and the earnest petition went up from his struggling soul to heaven: “O Lord, give me Scotland, or I die!” Then a pause of hushed stillness, when again the petition broke forth: “O Lord, give me Scotland, or I die!”

Once more all was voiceless and noiseless; when, with a yet intenser pathos, the thrice-repeated intercession struggled forth: “O Lord, give me Scotland, or I die!” And God gave him Scotland, in spite of Mary [Queen of Scots] and Cardinal Beaton; a land and a church of noble Christian loyalty to Christ and His crown, even unto this day. How could it be otherwise? The history of the salvation and sanctification of human souls hitherto is the history of such praying as this, in spirit, if not in these, or any, uttered words. Such humble earnestness never offends the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, through Him, is the God of all grace and consolation.”

John Knox (1510-1572) as recounted in *The Christian's Penny Magazine* (London: John Snow & Co., 1868) 4.181-182.

Not only does our Father in Heaven welcome our persistent prayers in humble earnestness, they can impact even the hardest people and whole nations. It was widely known that John Knox prayed and fasted regularly and the wicked Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots said “she feared no weapon like she feared the prayers of John Knox.”

Why cite this example in Lent? Last week we considered the gift that prayer is. Today let us assess the power of this gift. It's unfathomable! But do we pray like we believe this? The God of heaven invites us to approach His throne boldly (cf. [Hebrews 4:16](#)). Do we? Let us not just practice the discipline of prayer daily this Lent; let us pray boldly!

Second Friday of Lent

John Wesley: Afflict our Souls

“Not that we are to imagine, the performing the bare outward act [of fasting] will receive any blessing from God...No, surely, if it be a mere external service, it is all but lost labor...But let us take care to afflict our souls as well as our bodies. Let every season, either of public or private fasting, be a season of exercising all those holy affections which are implied in a broken and contrite heart. Let it be a season of devout mourning, of godly sorrow for sin; such a sorrow as that of the Corinthians, concerning which the Apostle saith, “I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance” [[2 Corinthians 7:9](#)] ...

And with fasting let us always join fervent prayer, pouring out our whole souls before God, confessing

our sins with all their aggravations, humbling ourselves under his mighty hand, laying open before him all our wants, all our guiltiness and helplessness. This is a season for enlarging our prayers, both in behalf of ourselves and of our brethren. It remains only, in order to our observing such a fast as is acceptable to the Lord, that we add alms thereto; works of mercy, after our power, both to the bodies and souls of men: “With such sacrifices” also “God is well pleased.” [[Hebrews 13:16](#)]

John Wesley (1703-1791) excerpt of *Sermon 27.4.3-7*. “Upon Our Lord’s Sermon On The Mount: Discourse Seven” on [Matthew 6:16-18](#).

Wesley is spot on: fasting, prayer, and almsgiving must not just afflict our bodies, they must afflict our souls. They must change us to the core. As we journey through Lent, we may feel a change in our bodies, but the real question is whether or not we are feeling it in our souls? Do we have broken and contrite hearts?

In [Joel 2:13](#) the prophet proclaimed: *Don’t tear your clothing in your grief, but tear your hearts instead. Return to the LORD your God, for he is merciful and compassionate, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. He is eager to relent and not punish. and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.*

Before doing acts of mercy this Lent, let’s make sure our hearts are right. We are just getting into Lent, and if our hearts aren’t broken before God, the whole journey will be, in the words of Wesley, “lost labor”. Take five minutes in silence today. Ask God to show you sin in your heart, confess it and experience the gift of forgiveness. Then pursue acts of mercy toward others even as you have received mercy.

Second Saturday of Lent

Martin Luther: Look at Your Own Life

“Know that to serve God is nothing else than to serve your neighbor and do good to him in love, be it child, wife, servant, enemy, friend; without making any difference, whoever needs your help in body or soul, and wherever you can help in temporal or spiritual matters. This is serving God and doing good works.

O Lord God, how do we fools live in this world, neglecting to do such good works, though in all parts of the world we find the needy, on whom we could bestow our good works; but no one looks after them nor cares for them.

But look to your own life. If you do not find yourself among the needy and the poor, where the Gospel shows us Christ, then you may know that your faith is not right and that you have not yet tasted of Christ’s benevolence and work for you.”

Martin Luther in “The Doctrine of Faith and Good Works” (56) in *Through the Year with Martin Luther: A Selection of Sermons Celebrating the Feasts and Seasons of the Christian Year* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2007) 80.

While Luther’s message to the Church can be summarized as “salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone”, He rightly exhorts us, as recipients of Christ’s benevolence, to serve the needy. We are to help with “temporal or spiritual matters”, which means aiding those who are suffering some personal crisis and those who may need our help spiritually.

What about you?

As a recipient of divine mercy do you find yourself among the hurting, materially and/or spiritually? Or do you buffer yourself from such people? If you “look at your own life” what do you see? Open your calendar. How do you spend your time? Mark one thing you can do next week to place yourself among the temporally or spiritually needy. Why do this? In the same narrative Luther adds these insightful words.

“Therefore, behold what an important saying it is, “Blessed is he whosoever shall find no occasion of stumbling in me” [[Matthew 11:6](#)]. We stumble in two respects. In faith, because we expect to become pious Christians in a different way than through Christ and go our way blindly, not acknowledging Christ. In love we stumble, because we are not mindful of the poor and needy, do not look after them, and yet we think we satisfy the demands of faith with other works than these.”

Second Sunday of Lent

Alphonsus Liguori: The Holy Furnace

“The soul that stops praying stops loving Jesus Christ. Prayer is the holy furnace in which the fire of holy love is enkindled and kept alive.”

Alphonsus Liguori (1696-1787) in *Lent and Easter Wisdom from St. Alphonsus Liguori*, comp. Maurice J. Nutt (Liguori: Liguori, 2011) 101.

How is the discipline of prayer changing you this Lent? Has the shift taken place yet? About this time in Lent I find something happens within me. Having set aside special time for prayer for many days in a row, I find that even though it’s a feast day, when I can rest from my disciplines, that I don’t want to stop. I want *more* time with the Father in prayer.

Paul exhorted the Thessalonian church (and us) to “pray without ceasing” ([1 Thessalonians 5:17](#)). Why cherish prayer? Prayer is the pathway to communion with God by the Holy Spirit through Jesus Christ our Lord. Sit with someone today and talk about your Lenten experience so far. Finish these sentences: In prayer, I am learning... When I fast, I find... In giving, I discover...

Second Monday of Lent

G.K. Chesterton: Suffered a Shipwreck

“I happen to think the whole modern attitude towards beggars is entirely heathen and inhuman. I should be prepared to maintain, as a matter of general morality, that it is intrinsically indefensible to punish human beings for asking for human assistance. I should say that it is intrinsically insane to urge people to give charity and forbid people to accept charity...Everyone would expect to have to help a man to save his life in a shipwreck; why not a man who has suffered a shipwreck of his life?”

G.K. Chesterton (1874-1936) in *Fancies Versus Fads* as recounted in *Lent and Easter Wisdom from G.K. Chesterton* (Liguori: Liguori, 2007) 90.

Chesterton was brilliant with words. His society decried the giving and receiving of charity – the very heart of the gospel – and he was not ashamed to show them how absolutely crazy they were. He had a

knack of doing it with disarming statements like this one, which is worth repeating: “Everyone would expect to have to help a man to save his life in a shipwreck; why not a man who has suffered a shipwreck of his life?”

The power of charity for a shipwrecked humanity is the way in which God personally delivered it. “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” ([Romans 5:8](#)) The question for each of us is will we succumb to society’s expectations or imitate our Savior for the shipwrecked lives around us? Know anyone who has “suffered a shipwreck” in life? Do something to aid them today.

Second Tuesday of Lent

Clare of Assisi: Example and Mirror

“With what eagerness and fervor of mind and body, therefore, must we keep the commandments of God...so that, with the help of the Lord, we may return to Him an increase of talents [cf. [Matthew 25:15-23](#)]. For the Lord Himself placed us as a model, as an example and mirror not only for others, but also for our sisters...Since the Lord has called us to such great things that those who are a mirror and example to others may be reflected in us, we are greatly bound to bless and praise God and to be strengthened more and more to do good in the Lord.”

Clare of Assisi in “The Testament” 61 as recounted in *Lent and Easter Wisdom from St. Francis and St. Clare of Assisi*, comp. John V. Kruse (Liguori: Liguori, 2008) 111.

The reason we practice the disciplines of prayer, fasting, and giving is not *for God* but *for us*, so that our lives toward others reflect as an “example and mirror” God’s great love to our brothers and sisters and the whole world (cf. [1 Timothy 4:12](#)).

Sit in silent prayer today for ten minutes. Thank God for His love and ask Him if there is some good that He has uniquely equipped you to do. End your time with this prayer. *Father in Heaven, give me the strength by your Holy Spirit and help me do this deed to reflect the love of Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Third Wednesday of Lent

Francis of Assisi: Good and Firm Purpose

“Listen, sons of the Lord and my brothers, pay attention to my words. Incline the ear of your heart and obey the voice of the Son of God. Observe His commands with your whole heart and fulfill His counsels with a perfect mind. Give praise to Him because He is good; exalt Him by your deeds; for this reason He has sent you into the whole world: that you may bear witness to His voice in word and deed and bring everyone to know that there is no one who is all-powerful except Him. Persevere in discipline and holy obedience and, with a good and firm purpose, fulfill what you have promised Him. The Lord God offers Himself to us as His children.”

Francis of Assisi (1182-1226) in “A Letter to the Entire Order” 116-117 as recounted in *Lent and Easter Wisdom from St. Francis and St. Clare of Assisi*, comp. John V. Kruse (Liguori: Liguori, 2008) 111.

Few in human history lived with the resolve exhibited by Francis of Assisi.

This excerpt from “A Letter to the Entire Order” offers at least two significant clues why the Franciscans

went on to influence countless people around the world. It drips with Scripture and unswerving commitment!

We can locate at least four verse from God's Word that echo through his voice: [Acts 2:14](#); [Isaiah 55:3](#); [Psalm 136:1](#); and [Hebrews 12:7](#). Does Scripture flow as readily from your lips and mine? That only happens when we are profoundly familiar with it, which takes an investment of time.

In prayer, consider the role of Scripture in your life. Do people hear it in your words and see it in your witness? Francis would say to "persevere...with a good and firm purpose" so that people may come to know the Lord! There is no more generous gift we can give them!

Third Thursday of Lent

Dallas Willard: Food You Don't Know About

"The hypocrites of Jesus' day tried to look as gloomy as possible when they fasted. They had even developed ways of disfiguring their faces with special markings in order to make sure people knew they were fasting...Jesus points out they get what they want. They want to be noticed in being "devout," and they certainly are noticed. "I tell you the truth," He says again, "they have their reward" (Matthew 6:16); that is the one they were looking for.

And then he points us in the right direction for fasting as a practice in kingdom living. "Take a shower," he says "and fix yourself up. Brush your teeth. Put on lotion and cologne and nice clothing so that others won't know you are fasting. Your Father who is in secret will see your hidden heart and enrich your life" ([Matthew 6:17-18](#)). Once again, one is impressed with what refreshing good sense characterizes Jesus' words.

Of course, if we are not well experienced with fasting in the spirit of Christ, we may think that we will be miserable when we fast. If we are miserable, shouldn't we look that way? Could Jesus be asking us to "fake it"? And indeed those who do not fast with God alone in view, or who have not yet learned how to do it well, will be miserable—as, no doubt, "the hypocrites" were.

But Jesus himself knew that when we have learned how to fast "in secret," our bodies and our souls will be directly sustained by the invisible kingdom. We will not be miserable. But we certainly will be *different*. And our abundant strength and our joy will come in ways a purely physical human existence in "the flesh" does not know. It will come from those sources that are "in secret"...

Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something." But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?" Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work." [John 4:31-34](#)

Dallas Willard (1935-2013) in *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1998) 195-196.

Last week we celebrated God's generosity in giving us the gift of prayer. Likewise, as we fast in body and spirit today let us celebrate the divine sustenance we graciously receive from the One whose abundance sustains all of creation (cf. [Colossians 1:17](#)) and us as we do the will of the Father. This is the food the world knows nothing about. Not sure how to partake of it?

Try this exercise. List all the things the world says you *need*. You need... You need... You need... Write

them on a piece of paper. Now consider things you have recently said you need. I need... I need... I need... List those things too. Look at what you have written down. Now take five minutes in silence and ask God what you need. Journal what comes to mind in secret.

Third Friday of Lent

Patrick of Ireland: His Gift, My Life

“So I am first of all a simple country person, a refugee, and unlearned. I do not know how to provide for the future. But this I know for certain, that before I was brought low, I was like a stone lying deep in the mud. Then He who is powerful came and in His mercy pulled me out, and lifted me up and placed me on the very top of the wall. That is why I must shout aloud in return to the Lord for such great good deeds of His, here and now and forever, which the human mind cannot measure.

So be amazed, all you people great and small who fear God! You well-educated people in authority, listen and examine this carefully. Who was it who called one as foolish as I am from the middle of those who are seen to be wise and experienced in law and powerful in speech and in everything? If I am most looked down upon, yet He inspired me, before others, so that I would faithfully serve the nations with awe and reverence and without blame: the nations to whom the love of Christ brought me. His gift was that I would spend my life, if I were worthy of it, to serving them in truth and with humility to the end.

In the knowledge of this faith in the Trinity, and without letting the dangers prevent it, it is right to make known the gift of God and His eternal consolation. It is right to spread abroad the name of God faithfully and without fear, so that even after my death I may leave something of value to the many thousands of my brothers and sisters — the children whom I baptised in the Lord. I didn’t deserve at all that the Lord would grant such great grace, after hardships and troubles, after captivity, and after so many years among that people. It was something which, when I was young, I never hoped for or even thought of.”

Patrick of Ireland (387-461) in his own words in *Confessio*, 12-15, translation by David Kelly.

What a confession!

My favorite part is where Patrick proclaimed: “His gift was that I would spend my life...serving them in truth and with humility to the end.” My life, your life, our lives, are gifts “to make known the gift of God and His eternal consolation.”

Whether you fancy a cool glass of water, a hot cup of coffee, or a pint of Guinness, let’s toast the perspective of Patrick of Ireland today and follow in his footsteps.

I’m in. How about you?

Third Saturday of Lent

J.D. Walt: Learn to Freely Receive

“What if I could freely receive and freely give? When Jesus says, “Seek the Kingdom,” I think he is saying, “Learn to receive.” Here’s what I think. To the extent we can receive from God, our lives will be a gift to others. Doesn’t Jesus say as much?

Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. [Luke 12:32-34](#)

The fundamental brokenness of the human race, the essence of the brokenness that we call sin, is the inability to freely receive. Isn't that the story of Eden; we preferred to "take" (*i.e.* steal) rather than receive. Fear and anxiety lead to "taking." Faith and love lead to receiving.

I'm beginning to think the secret to being a generous person is the ability to freely receive. What if my ability to give is only limited by my ability to receive?

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner."

J.D. Walt is Chief Sower at <http://seedbed.com/> and today's Meditation comes from his 6 March 2015 daily text entitled "Learn to Receive".

During Lent many people think that growing in generosity is learning to "freely give" for a season when in reality, it is the time when we must learn to "freely receive" for life in the kingdom (cf. [Matthew 10:8](#)). When we think of generosity as flowing from our finite capacities, it will be paltry at best. When it wells up from God's abundance that we have freely received, we become joyful distributors of material and spiritual blessings.

This means that when Lent is over, we get to keep living this way!

And it is precisely how Jesus' generosity is described by Luke in Acts. He received God's anointing, then went about doing good. He freely received and freely gave. *You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. [Acts 10:38](#).*

Will we learn to freely receive this Lent so that we can freely give in life? That's my prayer for every man and woman reading this. Teach us to receive, Father! Anoint our lives with your Holy Spirit and power so that people who see us don't celebrate our generosity but proclaim: "God is with him!" and "God is with her!"

Third Sunday of Lent

Jeanne Guyon: Feed Upon God's Will Alone

"Learn, then, the lesson of becoming a little one, of becoming nothing. A man who fasts—leaving off all those things his appetite improperly craves—does a good thing. But the Christian who is fasting from his own desires and his own will, and who feeds upon God's will alone, does far better. This is what Paul calls the circumcision of the heart."

Jeanne Guyon (1648-1717) in *Experiencing the Depths of Jesus Christ* (Sargent: CBPH, 1975) 141.

Today marks the third feast day of Lent. Let us feast on God's will as revealed to us through His Word. When we leave off those things our appetites improperly crave and feast on God's Word, according to the Apostle Paul, the Spirit circumcises our hearts (cf. [Romans 2:29](#)).

Why become a little one? Why become nothing? Jesus made Himself nothing and the Father's will was accomplished through Him, the greatest work in human history, the cross, which we will celebrate in five weeks, and we are exhorted to have the same mindset (cf. [Philippians 2:1-11](#)).

What's all this have to do with Lent, fasting, feasting, and generosity? That same text from Paul gives us the answer. *When we get out of the way God does His best work through us.* We shine like stars in the world (cf. [Philippians 2:12-18](#)). Feast on that today, and shine on!

Third Monday of Lent

John Calvin: Make Intercession

“Our prayer must not be self-centered. It must arise not only because we feel our own need as a burden we must lay upon God, but also because we are so bound up in love for our fellow men that we feel their needs as acutely as our own. To make intercession for men is the most powerful and practical way in which we can express our love for them.”

John Calvin (1509-1564) is widely attributed as the source of this statement on prayer.

As we focus on the discipline of prayer this Lent, let us do so with others in view, not just ourselves. Making intercession for others is, in the words of Calvin, both “powerful and practical,” and it's likely the most generous gift we can give someone else. How is intercession for others a part of your daily rhythm of life?

Try this exercise. Make a list of people to pray for this Lent. Not sure how to intercede? Try praying [Ephesians 1:15-23](#) or [3:14-21](#) over them. Keep it in the place where you physically go to pray or in your Bible for daily reference. The Apostle Paul would likely this say is the “first” thing each of us should do every day (cf. [1 Timothy 2:1](#)).

Third Tuesday of Lent

Thérèse de Lisieux: How Happy

“How happy does our Lord make me, and how sweet and easy is His service on this earth! He has always given me what I desired, or rather He has made me desire what He wishes to give... When the Divine Master tells me to give to whoever asks of me, and to let what is mine be taken without asking it again, it seems to me that He speaks not only of the goods of earth, but also of the goods of Heaven. Besides, neither one nor the other are really mine.”

Thérèse de Lisieux (1873-1897) in *The Story of a Soul*, X, “The New Commandment” as recounted in *Lent and Easter Wisdom from Thérèse de Lisieux*, comp. John Cleary (Liguori: Liguori, 2015) 41.

Today's reading illustrates the transformations that happen within us as we practice the disciplines of prayer and giving. Linked to prayer, how often do we desire Him *and* a list of other things, and in our seeking, find that He is all we need, and then from His abundance we receive even more.

Then regarding giving, once we find ourselves with far more than we need, which has all come to us from His hand, rather than enjoying and sharing these material and spiritual provisions we often clutch them too closely. Along these lines, the Apostle Peter might offer this reminder:

His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. [2 Peter 1:3](#).

When we live according to this reality, how happy we are! But it does not stop there. “His divine power” propels to action. Will it have that impact on us? Now that we realize we have “everything we need,” will we share from our goods of earth *and* from the goods of Heaven that all belong to the Master anyway?

Fourth Wednesday of Lent

Philip Yancey: Two Themes Converge

“I have come to see prayer as a privilege, not a duty. Like all good things, prayer requires some discipline. Yet I believe that life with God should seem more like a friendship than duty. Prayer includes moments of ecstasy and also dullness, mindless distraction and acute concentration, flashes of joy and bouts of irritation. In other words, prayer has features in common with all relationships that matter. If prayer stands as the place where God and human beings meet, then I must learn about prayer. Most of my struggles in the Christian life circle around the same two themes: why God doesn’t act the way we want God to, and why I don’t act the way God wants me to. Prayer is the precise point where those two themes converge.”

Philip Yancey in *Prayer: Does It Make Any Difference?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006) 17.

Yancey simply and powerfully summarizes the range of experiences associated with prayer. As we approach this discipline, don’t expect the heavens to open daily, a ray of light to magically fill the room at a specified time, or angels to appear with a message in response to our petitions. Most of the time it may be pretty quiet.

Think of Daniel, fasting and praying for twenty-one days, twenty-one long days, before having an angel visit him (cf. Daniel 10). Consider Anna, the 84 year-old prophetess, who fasted and prayed every day in the temple, waiting for the redemption of Israel (cf. [Luke 2:36-38](#)). Both eventually experienced God. Eventually.

Whether Daniel or Anna, you or me, each of us has moments or even days of dullness and not much ecstasy. So why pray? Don’t do it out of duty, do it because it’s a gift. What is so profound about this gift, in short, is that the themes that converge in prayer are His strength and our weakness.

Fourth Thursday of Lent

Julian of Norwich: A Spiritual Sight

“Our Lord showed me a spiritual sight...I saw that He is to us everything that is good and comfortable for us: He is our clothing that for love wrappeþ us, claspeþ us, and all encloseth us for tender love, that He may never leave us; being to us all-thing that is good, as to mine understanding...”

He showed me a little thing, the size of a hazelnut, in the palm of my hand; and it was as round as a ball. I looked thereupon with eye of my understanding, and thought: *What may this be?* And it was answered generally thus: *It is all that is made.* I marvelled how it might last, for methought it might suddenly have fallen to naught for littleness. And I was answered in my understanding: *It lasteth, and ever shall for that God loveth it.* And so all things hath being by the love of God.

In this little thing I saw three properties. The first is that God made it, the second is that God loveth it, the third, that God keepeth it. But what is to me verily the *Maker*, the *Lover*, and the *Keeper*... Also our Lord God showed that it is full great pleasance to Him that a helpless soul come to Him simply and plainly and homely. For this is the natural yearnings of the soul, by the touching of the Holy Ghost (as by the understanding that I have in this showing):

God, of Thy goodness, give me Thyself: for Thou art enough to me, and I may nothing ask that is less than may be full worship to Thee; and if I ask anything that is less, ever me wanteth, but only in Thee I have all.

For His goodness comprehendeth all His creatures and all His blessed works, and overpasseth without end. For He is the endlessness, and He hath made us only to Himself, and restored us by His blessed passion, and keepeth us in His blessed love; and all this of His goodness.”

Julian of Norwich (1342-1416) in *Showings*, also known as, *Revelations of Divine Love* (CSD edition) excerpt from the First Revelation.

Yesterday we determined that sometimes prayer is a quiet time when we don't hear much from God. Other times, like this one recounted for us in ancient English, we have revelations, showings, or in modern terms, “a-ha moments,” where the lights come on and things become clear. Why include “a spiritual sight” from Julian today?

The reason we practice the discipline of prayer, often in silence and solitude, is so that, should God reveal Himself, we are in a posture of receiving and sharing His gifts. Personally, I think most people are so busy and their lives are filled with so much noise that they allot no time for prayer or solitude and could not hear God's voice if he shouted to them with a megaphone.

For David, the Psalmist, the “showings” only happen in the stillness and out of the stillness emerges the gift of “knowing.” *Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.* [Psalm 46:10](#). That means all people (“nations”) and all creation, (“the earth”), including hazelnuts, shout the wonder of our Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer.

Think on these things in silence for five minutes today with our Maker, Lover, and Keeper as the celebration of “His blessed passion” draws ever nearer.

Fourth Friday of Lent

Aurthur Wallis: The Divinely Appointed Way

“Fasting is calculated to bring a note of urgency and importunity into our praying, and to give force to our pleading in the court of heaven. The man who prays with fasting is giving heaven notice that he is truly in earnest...Not only so, but he is expressing his earnestness in a divinely appointed way. He is using a means that God has chosen to make his voice to be heard on high.”

Arthur Wallis (1922-1988) in *God's Chosen Fast* (Ft. Washington: Christian Literature Crusade, 1968) 42.

Why pray in earnest by adding fasting during Lent?

Wallis says it best: it is “the divinely appointed way” to send a message to the Father. Thankfully Jesus gives us instructions on how to do it. He says, “When you pray...When you fast...” (cf. [Matthew 6:5-17](#)). Do we? Rewards await those who pray and fast. The best news is that we don’t have to stop this practice when Lent ends but can continue on “the divinely-appointed way” the rest of our lives.

Fourth Saturday of Lent

Teresa of Ávila: Compassionate Her

“When I see people very anxious to know what sort of prayer they practice, covering their faces and afraid to move or think lest they should lose any slight tenderness and devotion they feel, I know how little they understand how to attain union with God since they think it consists in such things as these. No, sisters, no; our Lord expects *works* from us. If you see a sick sister whom you can relieve, never fear losing your devotion; compassionate her; if she is in pain, feel for it as if it were your own and, when there is need, fast so that she may eat.”

Teresa of Ávila (1515-1582) in *Interior Castle* 3.11 (Grand Rapids: CCEL) 83.

In reading *Interior Castle*, this expression, “compassionate her,” struck me. Our Lord Jesus Christ saw people in need and had compassion on them (cf. [Mark 6:34](#)). Do we? All too often I sense I am tempted to follow the cultural norms and ignore or judge people rather than have compassion on them and sacrifice for them.

As we are focused on prayer, fasting, and almsgiving this Lent, we must remember that the aim of this inward and upward journey of union with God is to prepare us for the outward journey of compassionate service. By taking this route, God becomes the One who gives us the grace to sacrifice for others as He did for us.

Fourth Sunday of Lent

Benedict of Nursia: Continuous Lent

“The life of a monk ought to be a continuous Lent. Since few, however, have the strength for this, we urge the entire community during these days of Lent to keep its manner of life most pure and to wash away in this holy season the negligences of other times. This we can do in a fitting manner by refusing to indulge evil habits and by devoting ourselves to prayer with tears, to reading, to compunction of heart, and self-denial.

During these days, therefore, we will add to the usual measure of our service something by way of private prayer and abstinence from food or drink so that each of us will have something above the assigned measure to offer God of his own will *with the joy of the Holy Spirit* (1 Thessalonians 1:6). In other words, let each one deny himself some food, drink, sleep, needless talking and idle jesting, and look forward to holy Easter with joy and spiritual longing.”

Benedict of Nursia (480-543) in *The Rule of St. Benedict in English* 49.1-7 (Collegeville: Liturgical) RB 1980, 71.

We are about halfway through Lent. Today, Benedict reminds us that this season teaches us self-denial. Many Christians don’t like to talk about self-denial. They think (wrongly!) that it views God’s gifts as

bad and not to be enjoyed. Nothing could be further from the truth! The aim of Benedict's community of Christ-followers was enjoyment with self-denial so that indulgence is precluded and sharing is possible.

My prayer for you on this feast day is that this journey leads you to a lifestyle of "continuous Lent." Don't do this because I say so. Do it because it is the pathway Jesus marked for us. *Then he said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me" Luke 9:23.* In Major League Baseball terms, Self-denial is "Spring Training" for disciples of Jesus who desire to follow Him through the seasons of life!

Fourth Monday of Lent

Mother Teresa of Calcutta: Act the Charity of Christ

"My sisters and myself desire to bring Christ into the unhappy holes of the slums of Calcutta poor and later on to other places...by going amongst the people, nursing the sick in their homes, helping the dying to make peace with God, having little free schools in the slums for the little children, visiting the poor in the hospitals, and helping the beggars of the streets to lead respectful lives. In a word, act the charity of Christ among the poorest and so make them know Him and want Him in their unhappy lives."

Mother Teresa of Calcutta (1910-1997) in a letter to Archbishop Périer, Feast of Corpus Christi dated 5 June 1947, in *Come Be My Light: The Private Writings of the "Saint of Calcutta"* edited with commentary by Brian Kolodiejchuk (New York: Doubleday, 2007) 74.

As we find ourselves in the second half of Lent and begin to look to life beyond Easter, Mother Teresa would urge us to adopt a lifestyle of going amongst the destitute and filling "the unhappy holes" of their lives with Jesus Christ in word and deed. Consider doing this in your neighborhood, a section of the inner city, or wherever it makes sense based on where God has planted you.

Few things cause our light to shine more brightly than acts of charity. That's the view of the prophet Isaiah. *Feed the hungry, and help those in trouble. Then your light will shine out from the darkness, and the darkness around you will be as bright as noon. Isaiah 58:10.*

Fourth Tuesday of Lent

Evelyn Underhill: More Subtle Forms

"Pride and avarice mean the drive of energy set towards ourselves and our possessions. Lust and gluttony love too much. Sloth and envy love too little. They all turn up in our relation to the things God gives us to deal with—family, friends, work, and the practice of religion. As we wake up more towards spiritual reality and our world grows, the form of our sinfulness probably changes. The great wrong instincts of self-importance, pugnacity, grab, self-indulgence, slackness, are still there, but gradually pass from cruder to more and more subtle forms—spiritual pride, spiritual envy, spiritual greed: these still lie in wait for souls who *believe* they want nothing but God."

Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941) in "The Mount of Purification" as recounted in *Lent with Evelyn Underhill*, ed. by G.P. Malice Belshaw (Harrisburg: Morehouse, 1990) 57.

Through Lent we are realizing that the disciplines draw our attention to deeper spiritual realities. Few grasped these in the first half of the 20th century like Evelyn Underhill. In "The Mount of Purification"

she points the way to overcoming the seven deadly sins (cf. [Proverbs 6:16-19](#)).

For Underhill, *thanksgiving* turns pride into humility; *sacrifice* transforms anger into tranquility; *communion* replaces envy with charity; *commemoration* overtakes avarice with generosity; and *mystery* is when detachment reigns over greed. *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.* [Romans 12:21](#)

As we reorient our physical desires in *fasting* and redirect our perspective toward others in *giving* and reflect on our experiences in *prayer* during Lent we realize the “more subtle forms” these sins can take in our lives. May the Holy Spirit help us avoid “more subtle forms” as together we seek nothing but God.

Fifth Wednesday of Lent

Andrew Murray: Grasp the Invisible and Cast Away the Visible

Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, “Why could we not drive it out?” And He said to them, “Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you. But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.” [Matthew 17:19-21](#)

“From their expression, “Why could we not?” it is evident that they had wished and sought to do so; they had probably used the Master’s name, and called upon the evil spirit to go out. Their efforts had been vain, and, in the presence of the multitude, they had been put to shame. “Why could we not?” Christ’s answer was direct and plain: “Because of your unbelief.”

The cause of His success and their failure, was not owing to His having a special power to which they had no access. No. the reason was not far to seek. He had so often taught them that there is one power, that of faith, to which, in the kingdom of darkness, as in the kingdom of God, everything must bow; in the spiritual world failure has but one cause, the want of faith.

Faith is the one condition on which all divine power can enter into man and work through him. It is the susceptibility of the unseen; man’s will yielded up to, and molded by the will of God. The power they had received to cast out devils, they did not hold in themselves as a permanent gift or possession; the power was in Christ, to be received, and held, and used by faith alone, living faith in Himself...

But such want of faith must have a cause too. Well might the disciples have asked: “And why could we not believe? Our faith has cast out devils before this: why have we now failed in believing?” The Master proceeds to tell them ere they ask: “This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.”

Faith needs a life of prayer for its full growth...And prayer needs fasting for its full growth; this is the second lesson. Prayer is the one hand with which we grasp the invisible; fasting, the other, with which we let loose and cast away the visible...

Fasting helps to express, to deepen, and to confirm the resolution that we are ready to sacrifice anything, to sacrifice ourselves, to attain what we seek for the kingdom of God. And He who accepted the fasting and sacrifice of the Son, knows to value and accept and reward with spiritual power the soul that is thus ready to give up all for Christ and His kingdom.”

Andrew Murray (1828-1917) in *With Christ in the School of Prayer* (New York: Caledonian, 1912) 76-77.

The aim of Lent for each of us is to learn that prayer is the pathway for grasping “the invisible” and when coupled with fasting, that is the casting away of “the visible,” we gain reward (cf. [Matthew 6:18](#)).

So what’s the reward? Faith. With faith we learn to live according to the realities of Christ’s eternal kingdom here and now.

Fifth Thursday of Lent

Pamela Hawkins: Caverns of My Soul

Sometimes, O God, my thirst for you
is pushed aside, ignored,
or simply quenched by something other—
something more reasonable,
something more popular—than you.
But you never go away,
never stop,
never leave the depths of me.
Like an underground spring,
you are fresh and free,
breaking through.
Help me prepare a place for you in the caverns of my soul.
Amen.

Pamela Hawkins in *The Awkward Season: Prayers for Lent* (Nashville: Upper Room, 2009) 36, 38.

What’s bubbling up in the “caverns of your soul” this Lent? I pray it is the living water of Jesus Christ that is the only thing that can satisfy, the only refreshment that causes a person to never thirst again (cf. [John 4:14](#)). What happens to those who partake? Hawkins suggests we enjoy and share it freely, and to that end, she invites each of us to pray this prayer:

O Christ, who is Living Water,
who is deep calling to deep.
You call us to carry
hope to the hopeless,
love to the lost,
and water to the thirsty.
Fill me with your love
to overflowing
that I may have a part in you
and freely give it away.
Amen.

Fifth Friday of Lent

Oswald Chambers: Seemingly Random Circumstances

“*If you love me, keep my commandments.* [John 14:15](#). Our Lord never insists on our obedience. He stresses very definitely what we *ought* to do, but he never *forces* us to do it. We have to obey Him out of a

oneness of spirit with Him. That is why whenever our Lord talked about discipleship, He prefaced it with an “if” ... *If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.* [Luke 9:23](#)...

The Lord does not give me rules, but He makes His standard very clear. If my relationship to Him is that of love, I will do what He says without hesitation. If I hesitate, it is because I love something I have placed in competition with Him, namely, myself. Jesus Christ will not force me to obey Him, but I must. And as soon as I obey Him, I fulfill my spiritual destiny.

My personal life may be crowded with small, petty happenings, altogether insignificant. But if I obey Jesus Christ in the seemingly random circumstances of life, they become the pinholes through which I see the face of God. Then, when I stand face to face with God, I will discover that through my obedience thousands were blessed.”

Oswald Chambers (1874-1917) in “Obedience or Independence?” the November 2 reading in *My Utmost for His Highest* an updated edition in today’s language (Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 1992).

While Lent is the season for nurturing spiritual growth by focusing on key aspects of the faith, we must not wait for a special call to the mission field or a divine sign from heaven to put what we have learned to practice. We must obey in the “seemingly random circumstances” of life.

Our obedience in loving God and loving others creates “the pinholes” through which we see “the face of God.” That reminds me of the famous statement near the end of Victor Hugo’s, *Les Miserables*: “To love another person is to see the face of God!” What motivates us to love people?

For disciples of Christ, it’s not a *rule*; it’s a *response* to the love we have received from Him. What about you? Do you obey without hesitation? Does God have competition in your life? Take ten minutes in silence today to consider your answers. Do this so that you are prepared to stand face to face with God.

Fifth Saturday of Lent

Richard Baxter: Most Serviceable to God

“Your charity and care must begin at home but it must not end there. You are bound to do the best you can to educate your children, so they may be capable of being most serviceable to God, but not to leave them rich, nor to forbear other necessary works of charity, merely to make larger provision for them. There must be some proportion between the provision we make for our families and for the church of Christ. A truly charitable, self-denying heart, that hath devoted itself, and all that it hath, to God, would be the best judge of the due proportions, and would see which way of expense is likely to do God the greatest service, and that way it would take.”

Richard Baxter (1615-1691) in *The Reformed Pastor*, 5th edition, ed. William Brown (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1862) 167.

Baxter lived in a day when Christian parents with resources exhibited a sincere desire to attend to the needs of their children (cf. [1 Timothy 5:8](#)). That desire soon developed into an entitlement pattern: parents felt their children deserved “nothing but the best” of everything. Sound familiar? Many aimed to leave their children rich instead of being rich in charity, so Baxter shined light on this selfish and destructive trend (cf. [1 Timothy 6:17-19](#)).

If you are journeying through Lent with children (or grandchildren), be sure to teach them that the aim of self-denying simplicity is to make space for works of charity and grow as faithful disciples of Jesus. We invest money on resources and outings to impart these lessons. Why? To train children to grasp the value of sacrifice and charity, so that their souls may be “most serviceable to God” rather than self-absorbed.

Fifth Sunday of Lent

Ruth Haley Barton: More Finely Attuned

Yet even now, says the Lord, repent and return to me with all your heart. [Joel 2:12](#).

“The real question of the Lenten season is: *How will I repent and return to God with all my heart?* This begs an even deeper question: Where in my life have I gotten away from God and what are the disciplines that will enable me to find my way back?

How many and how subtle are the ways we “leave” God and the true spiritual journey in favor of other pursuits—even those that seem very noble and even necessary. The cares and concerns of life in this world and even the dreams and visions that God has given us can become distractions from the relationship itself...Returning to God with all our hearts begins with repentance...

Lenten disciplines help us to abstain from the daily distractions that prevent us from seeing and naming reality correctly. As we allow some of the external trappings of our lives to be stripped away, we can return to a truer sense of ourselves and a deeper pursuit of God. We acknowledge the subtle temptations to which we are prone rather than pretending that we are beyond temptation.

The disciplines of fasting and other kinds of abstinence help us to abstain from that which distracts us and numbs our awareness so that we can become more finely attuned to what is going on in our lives spiritually-speaking. We allow ourselves to experience the necessary grief that leads to repentance and we ask God to lead us in a new and everlasting way.”

Ruth Haley Barton in “Practicing Lent: Invitation to Return to God” blogpost dated 21 February 2012.

Hopefully what is happening to each of us this Lent is that we are experiencing “necessary grief that leads to repentance” while becoming “more finely attuned” both to God and the things that distract us from God, whether they be good things or bad things.

The prophet Joel instructs us how to do this: *Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity. [Joel 2:13](#).* Is it time for a heart-rending and returning exercise?

Let’s take some time today to make a list of things that distract us from God. *Father, forgive us, we are brokenhearted for pursuing these other things and missing you in the process. Recalibrate our route back to you, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Do this we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.*

Fifth Monday of Lent

Richard Foster: Nudgings of the Spirit

“Prayer changes things,” people say. It also changes us. The latter goal is the more imperative. The

primary purpose of prayer is to bring us into such a life of communion with the Father that, by the power of the Spirit, we are increasingly conformed to the image of the Son...None of us will keep up a life of prayer unless we are prepared to change. We will either give it up or turn it into a little system that maintains the form of godliness but denies the power of it—which is the same thing as giving it up.

When we begin to walk with God, He graciously and marvelously answers our feeble, egocentric prayers. We think, “This is wonderful. God is real after all!” In time, however, when we try to push this button again, God says to us, “I would like to be more than your Provider. I also want to be your Teacher and your Friend. Let me lead you to a more excellent way. I want to free you of the greed and avarice, the fear of hostility that make your life one great sorrow...” Each day in a new and living way the brooding Spirit of God teaches us. As we begin to follow these nudgings of the Spirit, we are changed from the inside out.”

Richard Foster in *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 57.

What will prayer look like in your life after Lent? Don't keep the form without the function! The form is prayer, the function is our transformation, and the agent of that change is the Holy Spirit. When we let God have His way in us, the Spirit produces the fruit of “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” in our lives ([Galatians 5:22-23](#)). This happens as we follow the “nudgings of the Spirit.” In plain language specifically related to generosity, we won't be any more generous after Lent if we don't submit to the work of the Spirit in our lives.

Father in Heaven, have Your way in each of us. As our Provider, transform our greed into generosity. As our Teacher, show us the more excellent way and help us walk in it. And as our Friend, move us from fear to faith by your Holy Spirit. Do all this we ask in the name of our risen Savior Jesus. Amen.

Fifth Tuesday of Lent

Bernadette of Lourdes: Give Witness

“The Church is you, me, all of us. It is not the local priest alone. Christians are the people chosen to give witness, everywhere, that God is love and He is only that!”

Bernadette of Lourdes (1844-1879) in *15 Days of Prayer with Saint Bernadette of Lourdes* by François Vayne (Hyde Park, New York, 2009) 70.

As we approach the Passion Week, be sure to take good notes because our greatest act of generosity for the rest of our lives is to “give witness” to the God who is love. Jesus' work on the cross for us—making atonement for our sins—is not just good news, it's the best news ever, because He rose from the grave, conquered sin and death, and freely offers life to all who believe (cf. [John 3:16](#))!

Sixth Wednesday of Lent

Brennan Manning: Brand New Creations

“The gospel is absurd and the life of Jesus is meaningless unless we believe that He lived, died, and rose again with but one purpose in mind: to make brand new creations. Not to make people with better morals, but to create a community of prophets and professional lovers, men and women who would surrender to the mystery of the fire of the Spirit that burns within, who would live in ever greater fidelity to the

omnipresent Word of God, who would enter into the center of it all, the very heart and mystery of Christ, into the center of the flame that consumes, purifies, and sets everything aglow with peace, joy, boldness, and extravagant, furious love. This, my friends, is what it really means to be a Christian. Our religion never begins with what we do for God. It always starts with what God has done for us, the great and wondrous things that God dreamed of and achieve for us in Christ Jesus.”

Brennan Manning (1934-2013) in *The Furious Longing of God* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2009) 125-126.

The life-giving work of Jesus Christ on the cross and the empty tomb not only marks the climax of Lent; it is how God has chosen to make all who believe “brand new creations” (cf. [2 Corinthians 5:17](#)).

Manning’s description of “what it means to be a Christian” is captivating. Christ has created “a community of prophets and professional lovers.” Jesus not only fulfilled the law for us and gave us one command, to love one another, He has given us the Holy Spirit to empower our obedience!

As we consider life after Lent, may two things be true of each of us. First, may our life be rooted in the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and second, may our generosity be aglow with the “peace, joy, boldness, and extravagant, furious love of God.”

Sixth Thursday of Lent

N.T. Wright: What is the good news?

“The Christian faith, in its earliest forms, is presented as *good news*. That is the original meaning of the Old English word *gospel*... We need, I suggest, to ask afresh: What is the good news that Jesus Himself announced and told His followers to announce as well? Most people—including many Christians—never ask themselves this question...

In many churches, the *good news* has subtly changed into *good advice*: Here’s how to live, they say. Here’s how to pray. Here are techniques for helping you become a better Christian, a better person, a better wife or husband. And in particular, here’s how to make sure you’re on the right track for what happens after death. Take this advice: say this prayer and you’ll be saved. You won’t go to hell; you’ll go to heaven. Here’s how to do it.

This is *advice*, not *news*.

The whole point of advice is to make you do something to get a desired result. Now, there’s nothing wrong with good advice. We all need it. But it isn’t the same thing as news. News is an announcement that something significant has happened...

The good news is primarily that God—the generous God, the loving God—is being honored, will be honored, has been utterly and supremely honored, in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.”

N.T. Wright in *Simply Good News: Why the Gospel is Good News and What Makes it Good* (New York: HarperCollins, 2015) 2, 4, 166.

The reason that all generosity flows from the gospel is because our generous God is at the heart of the good news. As we approach Passion Week and in perpetuity, let us proclaim the good news by lifting up Jesus, whose life, death, and resurrection, brought all glory to the Father. And as we do, may He draw all humankind to himself!

“Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die. [John 12:27-33](#).

Sixth Friday of Lent

John R. W. Stott: Stewards and not Proprietors

“When God made man, male and female, in His own image, He gave them dominion over the earth ([Genesis 1:26-28](#)). He made them stewards of its resources, and they became responsible to Him as Creator, to the earth which they were to develop, and to their fellow human beings with whom they were to share its riches. So fundamental are these truths that authentic human fulfillment depends on a right relationship to God, neighbor, and the earth with all its resources. People’s humanity is diminished if they have no just share in those resources.

By unfaithful stewardship, in which we fail to conserve the earth’s finite resources, to develop them fully, or to distribute them justly, we both disobey God and alienate people from His purpose for them. We are determined, therefore, to honor God as the Owner of all things, to remember that we are stewards and not proprietors of any land or property that we may have, to use the in the service of others, and to seek justice with the poor who are exploited and powerless to defend themselves. We look forward to the restoration of all things at Christ’s return ([Acts 3:21](#)). At that time, our full humanness will be restored, so we must promote human dignity today.”

John R. W. Stott (1921-2011) in his last of many wonderful books, *The Radical Disciple: Some Neglected Aspects of Our Calling* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2010) 70-71.

What have we learned this Lent? Our prayer time has blessed us with space to connect with God in a noisy world, our fasting has positioned us to feast on what is true and good, and in practicing generosity we have been training ourselves to serve as conduits of God’s material and spiritual blessings.

Moving forward, will we function as “stewards and not proprietors”? We will act like we own the place, or rather, take our place in God’s economy of all things that has been restored through the work of Christ on the cross. Now that we know this mystery, what way of living will we choose?

He has made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure that He set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in Him, things in heaven and things on earth. [Ephesians 1:9-10](#)

Sixth Saturday of Lent

George Friedrich Handel: Messiah Sets Captives Free

“*Messiah* was not originally intended as a piece of Christmas music. *Messiah* received its world premiere on 13 April 1742, during the Christian season of Lent, and in the decidedly secular context of a concert hall in Dublin, Ireland.

The inspiration for *Messiah* came from a scholar and editor named Charles Jennens, a devout and evangelical Christian deeply concerned with the rising influence of deism and other strains of Enlightenment thought that he and others regarded as irreligious...

Jennens compiled and edited a concise distillation of Christian doctrine, from Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah's coming through the birth, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ and then to the promised Second Coming and Day of Judgment.

Jennens took his libretto to his friend George Friedrich Handel and proposed that it form the basis of an oratorio expressly intended for performance in a secular setting during the week immediately preceding Easter. "*Messiah* would be directed at people who had come to a theater rather than a church during Passion Week," according to the Cambridge Handel scholar Ruth Smith...

"When he finished writing what would become known as the *Hallelujah Chorus*, [Handel] said, "I did think I did see all Heaven before me, and the great God Himself." ... The premiere on 13 April 1742 at Fishamble Street Musick Hall was a sensation. An overcapacity crowd of 700 people attended, raising 400 pounds to release 142 men from prison."

George Friedrich Handel (1685-1759) as recounted in "Handel's *Messiah* premieres in Dublin 13 April 1742" and *131 Christians Everyone Should Know* (Nashville: Christianity Today, 2000) 113-114.

Take time to listen to Handel's *Messiah* in one sitting. I am convinced it is the music of the throne room of heaven!

Also join me in sharing with at least one person this Passion week that Handel's *Messiah* was intended to be performed not merely in churches but for the world during the season of Lent and throughout the year. Even as it proclaims the gospel that sets people free from the power of sin and death, the proceeds donated from the premiere of Handel's "gift to the world" set 142 captives free.

Don't just share these historical facts with people. Some day this Passion Week, take time to either listen to Handel's *Messiah*, or read through the Scriptures that proclaim the *prophecies* (part one), the *passion* (part two), and the *promise* of the Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ! Do this, be blessed, and share the blessing with others!

Sixth Sunday of Lent / Palm Sunday

Origen of Alexandria: You are the colt!

"From the Gospel according to Luke, the account was read [[Luke 19:29-40](#)] of how, when the Savior had come "to Bethphage and Bethany near Mount Olivet, he sent two of his disciples" to untie "the foal of an ass" that had been tied, "on which no man had ever sat." This seems to me to pertain more to the deeper sense than to the simple narrative. The ass had been bound. Where? "Across from Bethphage and Bethany." "Bethany" means "house of obedience," and "Bethphage" "house of jaws," that is, a priestly place. For, jaw bones were given to priests, as the Lord commands [cf. [Deuteronomy 18:3](#)]. So, the Savior sends his disciples to a place where "obedience" is, where "the place given over to the priests" is, to unbind the foal of an ass, on which no man had ever sat...

The Lord Jesus came and commanded his disciples to go and untie "the colt of an ass," which had previously been bound, so that it could walk free... When he sent his disciples to untie it, he said, "If anyone asks you why you are untying the foal, say to him, 'Because the Lord has need of it.'" Many

people were lords of the colt before the Savior needed it. But after he began to be its Lord, the many ceased to be its lords... Even now the Lord “has need of” the colt. You are the colt of the ass... He wants you to be untied from the bonds of sin.

Then the disciples lay “their garments upon the ass” and have the Savior sit down. They take the Word of God and put it on the souls of the hearers. They take off their garments and “spread them out on the road.” The garments of the apostles are upon us; their good works are our adornment. The apostles want us to tread on their garments. And, indeed, when the ass imitates the disciples teaching and their life, it is untied by the disciples, bears Jesus, and treads on the apostles’ garments. Who of us is so blessed that Jesus sits on him? As long as he was on the mountain [of Olives], he dwelt only with the apostles. But when he begins to descend, a crowd of people runs to meet him...

The Pharisees saw this and said to the Lord, “Reprove them.” He said to them, “If they are silent the stones will cry out.” When we speak, the stones are silent. When we are silent, the stones cry out... Do you think that when the Son of man comes, he will find faith upon the earth?” We invoke the Lord’s mercy, lest we should be silent and the stones cry out. We should speak out and praise God, in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, to whom is all glory and power for ages of ages. Amen.”

Origen of Alexandria (182-254) excerpts from *Homily 37* on [Luke 19:29-40](#).

On this Palm Sunday, let us join the crowds in shouting praise. Why? You are the colt. I am the colt. And we have been untied! So let us celebrate with the zeal of the prophet Zechariah who foretold this day would come!

Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. [Zechariah 9:9](#)

We are freed from the Law and untied from the bonds of sin to walk in obedience. Let us celebrate our triumphant Lord, and as it pertains to our good works and generosity, let us follow the example of the saints who have gone before us. Let us announce by our words and actions the glory of our victorious King!

Sixth Monday of Lent / Holy Week Monday

Ambrose of Milan: Voluntary Obedience

“God does not want His temple to be a trader’s lodge but the home of sanctity. He does not preserve the practice of the priestly ministry by the dishonest duty of religion but by voluntary obedience. Consider what the Lord’s actions impose on you as an example of living...

He taught in general that worldly transactions must be absent from the temple, but he drove out the moneychangers in particular. Who are the moneychangers, if not those who seek profit from the Lord’s money. and cannot distinguish between good and evil? Holy Scripture is the Lord’s money.”

Ambrose of Milan (337-397) in *Exposition of the Gospel of Luke* as recounted in *Ancient Christian Commentary on the Scriptures: Luke*, Vol. III, ed. Arthur A. Just, Jr. (Downers Grove: IVP, 2003) 301.

On Holy Week Monday, [Luke 19:45-48](#) records the famous scene where Jesus drives out the merchants and moneychangers (cf. [Matthew 21:12-17](#)). Why? Ambrose reminds us that the preservation of God’s

work and its ongoing sustenance is not rooted in moneymaking ventures but rather voluntary obedience. But why would Jesus take such strong measures to cleanse God's house?

In the first century, religious leaders believed (*wrongly!*) that money made ministry to happen. Thus, they allowed a wide range of activities to fill God's house that were focused solely on bringing in cash. This worldly thinking is known as "the love of money" and though the religious leaders in Jesus' day exhibited it ([Luke 16:14](#)) those who oversee God's work must not (cf. [1 Timothy 3:1-7](#); [Titus 1:5-9](#)).

Is it time for a house cleaning? Does your heart feel more like a trading post than a place of prayer? Are you fixated on getting money or obeying God? What about your church? *Father, show us by your Holy Spirit where dishonest duty prevails in our hearts and replace it with voluntary obedience. Do this in our lives and at our churches we ask in the name of Jesus, so that sanctity and community may be restored. Amen.*

Sixth Tuesday of Lent / Holy Week Tuesday

John Chrysostom: For Our Own Salvation and Our Neighbor's Advantage

On Holy Week Tuesday Jesus teaches the disciples on the Mount of Olives (a.k.a. "the Olivet Discourse") and concludes his instruction with three parables recorded in [Matthew 25](#). On the "parable of the talents" recorded in [Matthew 25:14-30](#), John Chrysostom offers these comments in his ancient commentary.

"Let us, therefore, knowing these things, contribute whatever we have—wealth, diligence, or caregiving—for our neighbor's advantage. For the talents here are each person's abilities, whether in the way of protection, or in money, or in teaching, or in whatever thing you have been given. Let no one say, "I have but one talent and can do nothing with it." You are not poorer than the widow. You are not more uninstructed than Peter and John, who were both "unlearned and ignorant men" ([Acts 4:13](#))...

For this end God gave us speech, and hands, and feet, and strength of body and mind and understanding, that we might use all these things both for our own salvation and for our neighbor's advantage. Our speech is not only useful for hymns and thanksgiving, but it is profitable also for instruction and admonition. And if indeed we use it to this end, we should be imitating our Master; but if for the opposite ends, the devil."

John Chrysostom (c. 349-407) in *The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 78.3*, as recounted in *Ancient Christian Commentary on the Scriptures: Matthew 14-28*, Vol. Ib, ed. Manlio Simonetti (Downers Grove: IVP, 2002) 228.

In this parable, Jesus states plainly that faithful stewards put the Master's resources to work and enter the joy of the Lord, while the unfaithful stewards do not and are banished to the place of weeping and gnashing of teeth. This has led some (*wrongly!*) to conclude that good works can earn eternal salvation. So what our Master trying to teach us?

Chrysostom nails it. As we obey our Master, we both work out our own salvation (cf. [Philippians 2:12-15](#)) and serve as conduits of blessing to those around us, namely, our neighbors. In plain terms, "we figure it out as we go," and there's no excuse because even unlearned blokes like Peter and John sorted it, not by their brilliance, but rather humble obedience.

What about you? Are you using your talents for your own salvation and your neighbor's advantage? If not Chrysostom and I would urge you to assess which Master you are serving. Why? Chrysostom concludes

with these words highlighting the eternal implications to our response:

“As we have opportunity, let us work to cooperate with our salvation. Let us get oil for our lamps. Let us labor to add to our talent. For if we are backward and spend our time in sloth here, no one will pity us any more hereafter, though we should wail ten thousand times...Remember the virgins who again entreated and came to him and knocked, all in vain and without effect (cf. [Matthew 25:1-13](#)).”

Seventh Wednesday of Lent / Silent Wednesday

Epiphanius the Latin: The World of the Dead

Today is known as “Silent Wednesday” as little is known of the events on this day in the Passion Week. We can surmise that the disciples would have been reflecting on Jesus’ teachings the day before, the last of which in Matthew’s account was “the parable of the sheep and the goats” ([Matthew 25:31-46](#)). Epiphanius the Latin offers this comment about eternal punishment and eternal life at the conclusion of this parable.

“You see, my beloved, there is no excuse for it. They knew what they had to do in this world. But greed and ill-will prevented them, so they laid up for themselves not treasures for the future but for the world of the dead. Neither were they condemned because of the active wrong they did, nor did the Lord say to them, Depart from me, you wicked, because you committed murder or adultery or theft. But instead: because I was hungry and thirsty in my servants, and you did not minister to me.”

Epiphanius the Latin (late fifth, early sixth century) in *Interpretation of the Gospels 38* as recounted in *Ancient Christian Commentary on the Scriptures: Matthew 14-28*, Vol. 1b, ed. Manlio Simonetti (Downers Grove: IVP, 2002) 228.

Epiphanius the Latin was likely the bishop of either Benevento, Italy or Seville, Spain during the era referred to as “the dark ages.” He got my attention with this expression: “the world of the dead.”

With this exhortation, he is effectively saying: “You know what you need to do. Deploy yourselves and the resources in your care in obedience and you will take hold of life. Failure to do so is nothing more than hoarding them in the world of the dead, and this effectively demonstrates your disobedience and foreshadows your own doom.”

Times seem dark today too. Many are living for “the world of the dead.” Regardless of what everyone else is doing, let’s respond to this exhortation of Epiphanius and join the ranks of the sheep in [Matthew 25:31-46](#). Reflect on the parable again, and let’s resolve together not to live for “the world of the dead” but in life after Lent let’s demonstrate our obedience through our deeds.

Seventh Thursday of Lent / Maundy Thursday

Basil of Caesarea: Give Thanks to God

“When you sit down to eat, pray. When you eat bread, do so thanking Him for being so generous to you. If you drink wine, be mindful of Him who has given it to you for your pleasure and as a relief in sickness. When you dress, thank Him for His kindness in providing you with clothes. When you look at the sky and the beauty of the stars, throw yourself at God’s feet and adore Him who in His wisdom has arranged things in this way. Similarly, when the sun goes down and when it rises, when you are asleep or awake,

give thanks to God, who created and arranged all things for your benefit, to have you know, love, and praise their Creator.”

Basil of Caesarea, a.k.a. “Basil the Great” (330-379) in *Hom. in Julittam martyrem*.

Many will observe a Passover meal or Seder dinner today or sometime during Holy Week. We do this to remember that God saved His people from bondage in the days of Exodus and to celebrate the miraculous deliverance that foreshadowed the work of Christ for all humankind on the cross.

At your ceremonial meal or sometime this week with family or friends, read this prayer by Basil of Caesarea when you sit down to eat and give thanks to God in your hearts. Do this so as not forget all His benefits. Read a Scripture along with it too, such as [Psalm 103](#).

Seventh Friday of Lent / Good Friday

Jerome of Stridon: Put Avarice to Death

“The death [Jesus] died, he died to sin once for all (cf. [Colossians 2:15](#)). Thus, if our bodies are the members of Christ, then our flesh is the flesh of Christ. And while we are on earth we crucify it and through it we put to death impurity, lust, evil desire, and avarice...But it takes no small effort to live in the present age in such a way that the life of Jesus is revealed in our flesh right now, for our mortal bodies will accordingly be made alive through the Spirit who dwells within us.”

Jerome of Stridon (347-420) or “Dr. Jerome” as I like to refer to him because he was likely the most learned of the Four Doctors of the Western Church, in his *Commentary on Galatians* (Washington, DC: CUA, 2010) 241.

Jerome makes the profound point that we don’t just “put off” or “put away” sins like avarice, which is the opposite of generosity, we “put to death” avarice! As you reflect on the cross today, “put to death” impurity, lust, evil desire, avarice, and other sins which beset you. Be crucified with Christ, as described by the Apostle Paul.

I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.
[Galatians 2:19b-20](#)

Living by faith in the Son of God is not easy! Jerome, the wise doctor, adds: “it takes no small effort to live in the present age in such a way that the life of Jesus is revealed in our flesh right now.” Thankfully, the Spirit which dwells within us makes us alive, so let us rest in the truth that God will do all this for His glory and because of His great love.

Seventh Saturday of Lent / Holy Week Saturday

Pope Francis: Humility or Worldliness

“At the heart of this celebration, which seems so festive, are the words we heard in the hymn of the Letter to the Philippians: “He humbled Himself” ([2:8](#)). Jesus’ humiliation. These words show us God’s way and the way of Christians: it is humility. A way which constantly amazes and disturbs us: we will never get used to a humble God...”

This is God's way, the way of humility. It is the way of Jesus; there is no other. And there can be no humility without humiliation. Following this path to the full, the Son of God took on the "form of a slave" (cf. [Philippians 2:7](#)). In the end, humility means service. It means making room for God by stripping oneself, "emptying oneself", as Scripture says ([v. 7](#)). This is the greatest humiliation of all.

There is another way, however, opposed to the way of Christ. It is worldliness, the way of the world. The world proposes the way of vanity, pride, success...the other way. The evil one proposed this way to Jesus too, during His forty days in the desert. But Jesus immediately rejected it. With Him, we too can overcome this temptation, not only at significant moments, but in daily life as well.

In this, we are helped and comforted by the example of so many men and women who, in silence and hiddenness, sacrifice themselves daily to serve others: a sick relative, an elderly person living alone, a disabled person...

We think too of the humiliation endured by all those who, for their lives of fidelity to the Gospel, encounter discrimination and pay a personal price. We think too of our brothers and sisters who are persecuted because they are Christians, the martyrs of our own time. They refuse to deny Jesus and they endure insult and injury with dignity. They follow Him on his way. We can speak of a "cloud of witnesses" (cf. [Hebrews 12:1](#)).

Let us set about with determination along this same path, with immense love for Him, our Lord and Savior. Love will guide us and give us strength. For where He is, we too shall be (cf. [John 12:26](#)). Amen."

Pope Francis in *Palm Sunday Homily* delivered at St. Peter's Square on 29 March 2015 (Vatican Radio).

Pope Francis points us to a powerful text. Let us meditate on [Philippians 2:1-11](#) today, Holy Week Saturday. Therein, the Apostle Paul announces that Jesus was "obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." Do we imitate Christ's humility, service, and obedience? Or do we conform to the pattern of the world (cf. [Romans 12:1-2](#))?

Take ten minutes today and pray for Christians around the world. Many imitate Christ's humility through serving the sick or the elderly. Some have wandered down the path of worldliness. Others, for naming Jesus as "Lord and Savior," are suffering martyrdom.

What about you? In life after Lent, what path will you take, humility or worldliness?

Seventh Sunday of Lent / Easter / Resurrection Sunday

John Newton: But the Lord

"When my wife died the world seemed to die with her. I see little now, but my ministry and my Christian profession, to make a continuance in life, for a single day, desirable; though I am willing to wait until my appointed time. If the world cannot restore her to me, it can do nothing for me. The Bank of England is too poor to compensate for such a loss as mine. But the Lord, the all-sufficient God, speaks, and it is done. Let those who know Him, and trust Him, be of good courage. He can give them strength according to their day; He can increase their strength as their trials are increased, to any assignable degree. And what He can do, He has promised He will do."

John Newton (1725-1807), former slave trader, preacher, and author of the famous hymn, Amazing Grace

(1799), in “A Relation of some Particulars, respecting the Cause, Progress, and Close of the last Illness of my late dear Wife,” in *The Works of the Rev. John Newton*, Volume IV (New Haven: Nathan Whiting, 1824) 212.

Why conclude Lent with this statement from Newton?

Everyone reading this has experienced brokenness, is currently enduring difficulty, or will someday suffer great trials. The gospel is not a magic wand to make our troubles go away. In the midst of our pain, Newton rightly announces, “But the Lord, the all-sufficient God, speaks, and it is done.”

Jesus proclaims peace! Because of the resurrection that we celebrate today, we know that all Jesus promised He will do, and someday, thanks to His great love and grace, He will make all things new. *“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”* [John 16:33](#)

As we move from this season of Lent (where we have focused on growing in our understanding and practice of the disciplines of prayer, fasting, and giving to those in need) to living the rest of our lives, let us depend on the strength of God to share the precious gift of the peace of Christ in word and deed with a lost and hurting world. Should trials bombard us along the way, Newton would remind each of us to proclaim: *'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.*