



A SIX-WEEK DEVOTIONAL

ATTEND ATTEND

A LENTEN
INVITATION
INTO
ATTENTIVE
LIVING



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Contents

Introduction	iv	Fourth Sunday in Lent	55
The First Days of Lent	v	Sunday <i>Defeated by Death</i>	56
Ash Wednesday <i>True Healing</i>	2	Monday <i>A Word of Welcome</i>	58
Thursday <i>Breached Borders</i>	4	Tuesday <i>The Promised Land</i>	60
Friday <i>Great Mercies</i>	6	Wednesday <i>Capture the Moment</i>	62
Saturday <i>Nothing to Hide</i>	8	Thursday <i>Enter His Rest</i>	64
		Friday <i>A New Heart</i>	66
First Sunday in Lent	10	Saturday <i>Remember the Future</i>	68
Sunday <i>Into the Wilderness</i>	11		
Monday <i>A Way of Life</i>	13	Fifth Sunday in Lent	70
Tuesday <i>Joyful Discipline</i>	15	Sunday <i>Learning to Pray</i>	71
Wednesday <i>Think of God</i>	17	Monday <i>A Guarded Life</i>	73
Thursday <i>I Am Your Shield</i>	19	Tuesday <i>Channels of Grace</i>	75
Friday <i>Fear the Lord</i>	21	Wednesday <i>God Stories</i>	77
Saturday <i>Walk With Jesus</i>	23	Thursday <i>The Lord is With You</i>	79
		Friday <i>My Own Faults</i>	81
Second Sunday in Lent	25	Saturday <i>The Lord Has Made</i>	83
Sunday <i>An Invitation Into Intimacy</i>	26		
Monday <i>Seek His Presence</i>	28	Holy Week	85
Tuesday <i>The Lord Will Provide</i>	30	Palm Sunday <i>The God Who Saves</i>	86
Wednesday <i>The Wound of Sin</i>	32	Monday <i>The Shadow of the Cross</i>	88
Thursday <i>Formed in Wonder</i>	34	Tuesday <i>Rock of Refuge</i>	90
Friday <i>Learning to Linger</i>	36	Wednesday <i>An Enduring Faith</i>	92
Saturday <i>Mountaintop Moments</i>	38	Maundy Thursday <i>Concrete Love</i>	94
		Good Friday <i>Purged With Hyssop</i>	96
Third Sunday in Lent	40	Holy Saturday <i>The Space Between</i>	98
Sunday <i>No Other Gods</i>	41	Easter	100
Monday <i>Begin to Build</i>	43	Easter Sunday <i>A Gate to Freedom</i>	101
Tuesday <i>God Tells Long Stories</i>	45		
Wednesday <i>Turning Over Tables</i>	47	The Nicene Creed	103
Thursday <i>Give Thanks</i>	49	Endnotes	104
Friday <i>Understanding God</i>	51		
Saturday <i>Longing for Beauty</i>	53		

Introduction

We live in an instant society. The world is at our fingertips, and we expect immediate results in every area of life, including our life with Christ. And yet, there are some things that simply cannot be rushed.

Wood-smoked beef brisket. An apple orchard. The development of a child in their mother's womb. A relationship defined by trust and vulnerability.

In fact, some of the best things in life develop slowly and quietly, often out of sight and easily missed.

Lent is an annual invitation for Christians to slow down in order to catch up with God. To close our eyes so we can truly see. To quiet our hearts so we can truly hear. To simplify our schedules so we can truly serve.

In this way, the next six weeks are meant to be an overwhelmingly *positive* experience. If we miss this fact, we will take on practices of self-denial that become ends in and of themselves, losing sight of the destination to which they are meant to point. This season is an invitation into the new life of Christ. *Life* is the aim and *transformation* is the goal. The sorrow of Lent is healed by the joy of Easter.

Your growth into the likeness of Christ is a life-long journey. It takes time, care, and daily attentiveness. It cannot be rushed or fast-tracked.

Throughout this guide, you will be encouraged to reflect daily upon your life with God and to take on simple practices that encourage attentive living. Some of them may at first glance seem negative or even discouraging, inviting you to say “no” to certain habits or ways of being. However, do not lose sight of their redemptive purpose. Remember, within each one is a seed of the kingdom. Give it time and watch it grow.

The First Days of Lent



ASH WEDNESDAY

True Healing



Open Dwell and listen to Day 1

**Joel 2:1-2, 12-17 | Psalm 51:1-17 | 2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10 |
Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21**

When a man leaves on a journey, he must know where he is going.

—ALEXANDER SCHMEMANN

Lent is a six-week season of prayer, fasting, and intentional preparation for the glory of Easter. Ash Wednesday, which marks the beginning of this journey, derives its name from a traditional practice of marking Christians on their foreheads with ashes made into the shape of a cross, with these words spoken over them: “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” These are difficult and disorienting words to hear. No one wants to be reminded of their mortality, of the finality and temporal nature of life. We much prefer keeping this part of our humanity on the periphery of our existence.

Morbid as these words may seem at first, they actually invite great hope. Until we see the true state of our fallen and disordered humanity, we will fail to tend to our life with God with the intentionality and urgency that it demands. Urgency is not the same thing as anxiety or hurry. No, it is the acknowledgment that the joys of Easter first require that we treat our frailty and brokenness with honesty and sobriety. This is the only way to true healing.

Prayer for Ash Wednesday

Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing you have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

Planning is an essential part of a successful journey. As we begin the Lenten journey today, take a few minutes and decide the specific ways you will give yourself to this intentional season of prayer, fasting, and service to others. To assist in this decision-making process, ask yourself this simple, but revealing question: what has an excessive hold on your time, attention, or desires?

Notes

THURSDAY

Breached Borders



Open Dwell and listen to Day 2

Psalm 25:1-10 | Daniel 9:1-14 | 1 John 1:3-10

Let us flee from the deceit of life and its supposed happiness and run to Christ alone, who is the Savior of souls.

—ST. SYMEON THE NEW THEOLOGIAN

In the modern world, it is sometimes difficult to know how to join our hearts and lives to the ancient prayers of Scripture. For example, David cries out to the Lord for deliverance, saying “O my God, in you I trust; do not let me be put to shame; do not let my enemies exult over me” (Ps 25:2). Unlike David, you likely do not live with the existential threat of foreign nations coming to conquer your land and kill those you love. Yet, this does not mean you are free of enemies!

Lent invites us to identify the enemies of God that we have allowed to set up camp within the boundaries of our lives. In fact, you may live in proximity to real enemies of which you are entirely unaware. Today, you are invited to pray for God to give you a holy discomfort with their nearness. The enemies of your soul — pride, anger, lust, self-sufficiency — are not a neutral presence. The longer they persist, the more your health is compromised. Thus we pray, “Do not let my enemies exult over me.”

Prayer for the Week

Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing you have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

Take time to identify and name the enemies of your health that have taken up residence within the borders of your life.

Notes

FRIDAY

Great Mercies



Open Dwell and listen to Day 3

Psalm 25:1-10 | Daniel 9:15-25a | 2 Timothy 4:1-5

There is not a flower that opens, not a seed that falls into the ground, and not an ear of wheat that nods on the end of its stalk in the wind that does not preach and proclaim the greatness and the mercy of God to the whole world.

–THOMAS MERTON

The mercy of God is inescapably tied to the love of God. To pray “Lord have mercy” is to ask God to love us as only he knows how to love, as only he can. Conversely, the love of God finds meaning *through* the mercy of God, loving us by rescuing us from our enemies and all that enslaves us.

Israel’s captivity in Egypt was not only a moment in history but is a picture for all generations of captivity and exile from our true home. Apart from the mercy and love of God, each of us is like ancient Israel. Indeed, creation itself is bound to a foreign oppressor and unable to find freedom or a way forward. Hope, therefore, is not something we can manufacture or stir up within. We pray for mercy and intervention from one who loves us and is powerful to save. As Daniel reminds us today, “We do not present our supplication before you on the ground of our righteousness, but on the ground of your great mercies” (Dan 9:18).

Prayer for the Week

Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing you have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

How does your encounter of God's mercy enable and inspire you to extend mercy to others?

Notes

SATURDAY

Nothing to Hide



Open Dwell and listen to Day 4

Psalm 25:1-10 | Psalm 32 | Matthew 9:2-13

Let him deny his body some food, some drink, some sleep, some chatter, some joking, and let him await Holy Easter with the joy of spiritual desire.

-ST. BENEDICT

True Christian living is defined by an unshakable joy that transcends situation or circumstance. Joy is not a fleeting emotion but is the foundation upon which our life with Christ is built. It is the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit that brings healing and renewal to weary and wandering souls. It is the calm after the storm, the dawn that pierces the darkest of nights.

In Psalm 32, David's joy in the Lord is closely linked to his own sin and brokenness. Joy is not a detached euphoria but is rooted in his longing to be free from the sins that isolate him from God and others. It is tempting to ignore our sins and push them to the side, to bury them in the dark corners of our lives, hoping they will eventually go away. Yet, David shows us the only path to true freedom. "Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity" (Ps 32:5). Painful as it may be, joy is found when we bring our fears and failures out of the shadows and into the healing light of Christ.

Prayer for the Week

Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing you have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

Are there sins that you've allowed to persist in the shadows of your life? Take time today to bring them into the light, not for your shame, but for your healing.

Notes

First Sunday in Lent



SUNDAY

Into the Wilderness



Open Dwell and listen to Day 5

Genesis 9:8-17 | Psalm 25:1-10 | 1 Peter 3:18-22 | Mark 1:9-15

When the Lord had fasted for forty days in the wilderness, He at last became hungry, showing His human nature. Do not be despondent, my soul, if the enemy attacks you, but let him be beaten off by prayer and fasting.

—THE GREAT CANON OF ST. ANDREW OF CRETE

Mark 1 reminds us that the Trinity — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — is a community of perfect love working together for the redemption of the world. Here we see the faithful obedience of our Lord Jesus, entering into the chaos of creation through the waters of baptism in order to heal it and set up his kingdom in our midst. The Father affirms this mission by both speaking his pleasure over the Son and by sending the Spirit as a dove to rest upon Christ. One might be tempted to dwell in the beauty of this moment, to reflect upon the theological mysteries of the Trinity, and yet just as soon as we are presented with this scene, we are given these words: “And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness” (Mk 1:12).

The Holy Spirit is not only a source of consolation and comfort but is also the faithful invitation of God to *confront* the evils in our lives and brokenness in our world. The wilderness is where our sins are laid bare and our doubts and fears are brought into the light. Yet when we are driven by the Spirit into these places, he does not leave us or abandon us, but walks with us, leading us into places of peace. The Spirit of God does not work for your harm or destruction, but draws near so that you can be made whole.

Prayer for the Week

Almighty God, whose blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan: Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations; and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

Confrontation precedes comfort. Identify the sinful habits that you want to confront this Lent through the “weapons” of prayer and fasting.

Notes

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

MONDAY

A Way of Life



Open Dwell and listen to Day 6

Psalm 77 | Job 4:1-21 | Ephesians 2:1-10*Knowledge of God and faith in Him is the salvation and perfection of the soul.*

-ST. ANTHONY THE GREAT

Far too often, we think of salvation as a past event with little to no bearing on our day-to-day lives. We see it as a fixed moment in time, a gift of grace given through faith in Jesus Christ. And while faith certainly has a starting point in the life of the believer, salvation is also meant to animate our lived experience in the present and shape our hope for the future.

For St. Paul, salvation by faith is inseparable from the way we live our lives. It is neither an abstract doctrine nor a disembodied set of beliefs. No, it is entry into a life of service, a life in which we are given to good works for the sake of others. As he says in today's passage, salvation is prepared and intended by God "to be our way of life" (Eph 2:10). A way of life is inclusive of your entire being, how you view the world and your place within it. Salvation in Christ is not a footnote to your life or a slice of the pie chart. It is the life of God transforming and renewing the *whole* of your being.

Prayer for the Week

Almighty God, whose blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan: Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations; and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

Do you think of salvation as a single event, or the ongoing, continual reality of your life with Christ?

Notes

TUESDAY

Joyful Discipline



Open Dwell and listen to Day 7

Psalm 77 | Job 5:8-27 | 1 Peter 3:8-18a

I have found the paradox, that if you love until it hurts, there can be no more hurt, only more love.

–ST. TERESA OF CALCUTTA

Upon first glance, “joy” and “discipline” seem to be strange bedfellows. A corrective word from a boss or colleague is typically a source of frustration, disorientation, and self-defense, *not* delight, wonder, and gratitude. We are quick to plead our innocence and mistrust the intentions of the one bringing the reprimand. In fact, our ability to receive a corrective word with joy is entirely linked to the degree to which we trust the character and nature of the person bringing that word.

Job is able to receive the corrective voice of God because he is convinced that the Lord is good. He welcomes with joy the discipline of the Almighty, knowing that a “wound” or a “strike” from the Lord (Job 5:18), while possibly painful in the present moment, is in reality the Lord transforming his children evermore into the likeness of his Son. God loves us more than we know how to love ourselves. He is neither vindictive nor violent with you, but shapes you with the skill of an expert potter and burns with fire, not to consume, but to make you whole.

Prayer for the Week

Almighty God, whose blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan: Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations; and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

Do you believe God is good and desires good for you? Until we believe this in our bones, we will struggle to follow Jesus as he leads.

Notes

WEDNESDAY

Think of God



Open Dwell and listen to Day 8

Psalm 77 | Proverbs 30:1-9 | Matthew 4:1-11

The most holy and important practice in the spiritual life is the presence of God — that is, every moment to take great pleasure that God is with you.

—BROTHER LAWRENCE

It is remarkably easy to live life without any reference to God. In the mystery of his will, the Lord does not force himself upon us, neither does he coerce nor demand from us a positive response to his love. He invites us to become truly human, yet it is always that — an invitation. A gift that we choose to receive or reject. As such, Christian discipleship is a lifelong process of learning to live life with a constant awareness of the reality and nearness of God.

In light of this, it is no small thing for the psalmist to say, “I think of God” (Ps 77:3). This is the heartfelt prayer of a faithful disciple who discovered the joy of life lived with the abiding awareness of the goodness and love of God. Similarly, these thoughts of God allowed them to bring before the Lord their doubts, fears, and struggles, asking God to take them and transform them by his tender care for mankind. May we also “commune with our hearts in the night” (Ps 77:6), aware of our sins and shortcomings, but all the more mindful of the compassionate care of our Lord.

Prayer for the Week

Almighty God, whose blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan: Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations; and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

As you are able, take time this Lent at the end of each day, before going to bed, to ask yourself this question: “When was I aware today of the presence of God?”

Notes

THURSDAY

I Am Your Shield



Open Dwell and listen to Day 9

Psalm 22:23-31 | Genesis 15:1-6, 12-18 | Romans 3:21-31

When the fast makes its appearance, like a kind of spiritual summer, let us as soldiers burnish our weapons; and as farmers let us sharpen our sickle; and as sailors let us order our thoughts against the waves of extravagant desires; and as travelers let us set out on the journey towards heaven; and as wrestlers let us strip for the contest. For the believer is at once a farmer, and a sailor, and a soldier, a wrestler, and a traveller.

-ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

Whether in the words spoken to Abram in the Old Testament, or in the words of Jesus in the New, we hear God frequently remind his people of a foundational truth that we are prone to forget: we are safe in the kingdom of God. Does this mean that life is free of all temptation and loss, or that we can expect our world to never know conflict or violence? Of course not. And yet, to know God is to enter into the chaos without being overcome by it.

Over the years, Lent has been described as a battle and a conflict. To be free, we must first *confront* that which oppresses and enslaves. True as this may be, our victory in battle is not tied to our efforts and ingenuity, but rests solely on the mercy and protection of God. The Lord tells Abram, “I am your shield” (Gen 15:1). A shield belongs on the battlefield, and we belong in the battle. Contend today against sin, not from a place of desperation or anxiety, but in the confidence that comes from the nearness of our mighty God.

Prayer for the Week

Almighty God, whose blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan: Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations; and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

Lent invites us to turn outwards in service to others, requiring vulnerability and openness to the pain and brokenness that surrounds us. Press into these places today in the confidence that wherever you go, as a child of God, you are safe.

Notes

FRIDAY

Fear the Lord



Open Dwell and listen to Day 10

Psalm 22:23-31 | Genesis 16:1-6 | Romans 4:1-12*We must fear God out of love, not love Him out of fear.*

-ST. FRANCIS DE SALES

What does it mean to fear the Lord? This question has occupied the thoughts of faithful believers in each and every generation. In Scripture, the *fear* of God is typically connected to a *revelation* of God, an unveiling of some aspect of his divine life. In its simplest form, the fear of the Lord is *clarity of vision*. To fear God is to rightly discern his character and nature, and by extension, to see ourselves correctly in the light of his life.

Do you fear God? Put another way, is your understanding of God shaped and informed by his own self-revelation? If you keep God at arms length, distrusting his goodness and doubting his love, you may be filled with fear, but it is not the fear of the Lord. Every revelation of God is an invitation into the very life of the Trinity. Though we are stained and soiled by sin, we are seen and cherished by our Lord. As Psalm 22 reminds us, he does not “despise or abhor the affliction of the afflicted” (Ps 22:23). Embrace this great truth, respond in praise, and experience the joy of fearing God.

Prayer for the Week

Almighty God, whose blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan: Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations; and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

Fasting removes the layers of distraction that keep us from seeing clearly. In the time you might normally spend eating, drinking, or scrolling, embrace a healthy fear of the Lord and begin to see him in his beauty and love.

Notes

SATURDAY

Walk With Jesus



Open Dwell and listen to Day 11

Psalm 22:23-31 | Genesis 16:7-15 | Mark 8:27-30

True, one may know man's final goal: communion with God. And one may describe the path to it: faith, and walking in the commandments, with the aid of divine grace. One need only say in addition: here is the path — start walking!

—ST. THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

Intimacy with Jesus brings clarity about Jesus. Simply put, you cannot know him without being near to him. You can respect Jesus without knowing him. You can even follow Jesus at a great distance. Yet to *walk* with Jesus you must remain at his side. If you find yourself unsure of our Lord's guidance and direction in your life, it is highly likely that you have grown comfortable with a life lived at an unhealthy distance from Christ.

In Mark 8, we encounter a host of people who get Jesus' identity wrong. John the Baptist? Elijah? One of the prophets? (Mk 8:28) Each of these is a best-guess attempt from the crowds at identifying someone they have heard a great deal about, yet do not actually know. Are we guilty of the same offense? In our modern world, society lives with great familiarity about Christ, yet it seems far too rare that we are close enough to hear his words whispered directly to us, "Who do *you* say that I am" (Mk 8:29)?

Prayer for the Week

Almighty God, whose blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan: Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations; and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

Is your walk with Jesus a *lived* experience, or is it simply a mental openness to the *idea* of discipleship?

Notes

Second Sunday in Lent



SUNDAY

An Invitation Into Intimacy



Open Dwell and listen to Day 12

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16 | Psalm 22:23-31 | Romans 4:13-25 | Mark 8:31-38

We always find that those who walked closest to Christ were those who had to bear the greatest trials.

-ST. TERESA OF ÁVILA

Jesus longs for us to move from distant familiarity into a genuine encounter with God. His impulse is always towards relationships, towards community. He does not want to keep the uninformed crowds (or us) at arms length, but instead extends an invitation into intimacy. However, in this invitation he is equally clear on the cost of discipleship and the necessity of a change of mind and being. According to Jesus, the path to intimacy is self-denial. “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (Mk 8:34).

The closer we get to Jesus, the more aware we are made of our need for healing and redemption. Christianity is unintelligible apart from the realization that things in our world and our lives are not as they are meant to be. Therefore, every act of discipline, every moment of contrition, every struggle against sin is fundamentally about *freedom*, not bondage. We contend with brokenness to be made whole. We lose our life, knowing it is the only way to save it.

Prayer for the Week

O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy: Be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways, and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of your Word, Jesus Christ your Son; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*


Reflective Practice

What is your greatest life challenge in this present season? Rather than running from it in fear, how might you instead see it as an invitation to share in the sufferings of Christ and meet him in that place?

Notes

MONDAY

Seek His Presence

 Open Dwell and listen to Day 13
Psalm 105:1-11, 37-45 | Genesis 21:1-7 | Hebrews 1:8-12

God, who fashioned us and brought us out of non-existence into being, has placed us in this life as in a schoolroom to learn the gospel of his kingdom.

—ST. THEODORE THE STUDITE

Intentional discipleship is a lifelong pursuit that knows no end. To seek the Lord is to reorient yourself to life itself. Failure to do so is nothing less than a severing of the soul from its source of sustenance. Sure, you may eat and sleep, laugh or cry, yet it is entirely possible to be alive without ever living.

No matter how long you’ve walked with the Lord, you never graduate from his school of discipleship. It is a journey that we must give ourselves to, day in and day out. As Psalm 105 challenges us, “Seek his presence *continually*” (Ps 105:4). Vital as this pursuit of his presence is, we must also realize it is a choice and decision we make. Today, you have the freedom to live on purpose for the Lord. You also have the freedom to passively disengage from this beautiful struggle for holiness. Think carefully and prayerfully about how you will use your freedom, and take a step, small and simple as it may be, towards a sustainable and abiding life.

Prayer for the Week

O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy: Be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways, and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of your Word, Jesus Christ your Son; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

We never outgrow or move on from the foundations of our faith. In light of this, take time today to prayerfully read and reflect upon the words of The Nicene Creed (found on p. 103).

Notes

TUESDAY

The Lord Will Provide



Open Dwell and listen to Day 14

Psalm 105:1-11, 37-45 | Genesis 22:1-19 | Hebrews 11:1-3, 13-19

The power of God is effective when a person asks for the help from God, acknowledging his own weakness and sinfulness. This is why humility and striving towards God are the fundamental virtues of a Christian.

-ST. JOHN THE WONDERWORKER

When we find ourselves up against a wall — overwhelmed, exhausted or confused — we often must deal with emotions that we'd much rather ignore. These moments of difficulty invite us, sometimes even *force* us, to tend to the sins that lurk in the shadows of our lives: anger, pride, envy, fear. These patterns of brokenness may have been there for years, yet the season of struggle has painfully drawn them out into the light.

In one of the more difficult passages in the Old Testament, Abraham is forced into a situation of great struggle, one that undoubtedly required him to confront his deepest fears as he faced the sacrifice of his son, Isaac. And yet, he knew in his bones that which we are quick to forget, especially in an affluent, modern society: struggle is used by God to grow and shape us into his own likeness. Abraham loved his son deeply, yet also trusted the character of God and that he was good, even when faced with unspeakable loss. Trust in the midst of struggle frees us from the bondage of control and fear, allowing us to instead say, "The Lord will provide" (Gen 22:14).

Prayer for the Week

O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy: Be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways, and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of your Word, Jesus Christ your Son; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

Think about a time in your life when you saw the Lord provide for you, and pause to give him thanks for his goodness and care.

Notes

WEDNESDAY

The Wound of Sin



Open Dwell and listen to Day 15

Psalm 105:1-11, 37-45 | Jeremiah 30:12-22 | John 12:36-43

Ashes must be sprinkled first before the ugliness in us can be changed to spiritual beauty.

-FREDERIC DAN HUNTINGTON

To be human is to live with an incurable wound. No amount of self-administered treatment or tender care can provide a lasting remedy. The sickness has spread too far, the cut too deep. An accurate diagnosis, therefore, is crucial if we are to have any hope of recovery.

Lent invites us to rediscover both our need for healing and the cure that is found in Jesus Christ. Forgiveness undoubtedly lies at the heart of the Christian faith, yet forgiveness and healing are inseparably linked. Forgiveness is not simply the pardon of an infraction or offense but is the recovery of life and vitality that was lost. The Lord sees us in our sickness, and through the prophet Jeremiah makes the most remarkable promise: “For I will restore health to you, and your wounds I will heal” (Jer 30:17). As we walk towards the glory of Holy Week, let this ancient promise help you see the restorative nature of the cross of Christ, for as St. Peter reminds us, “By his wounds you have been *healed*” (1 Pet 2:24).

Prayer for the Week

O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy: Be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways, and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of your Word, Jesus Christ your Son; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*


Reflective Practice

How does the concept of sin as a *sickness* help you to gain compassion for others, especially those you might struggle to love?

Notes

THURSDAY

Formed in Wonder

 Open Dwell and listen to Day 16
Psalm 19 | Exodus 19:1-9a | 1 Peter 2:4-10

The innermost meaning of wonder is fulfilled in a deepened sense of mystery.

—JOSEF PIEPER

When was the last time you gazed at the stars or took in a panoramic view from the heights of a mountain? In the rush to get from point A to point B, do you ever *intentionally* take the scenic, less-travelled road, simply to enjoy the beauty of your surroundings? More intimately, can you recall the feeling of being overcome and undone by the beauty of someone you love?

Though we are quick to dismiss these experiences as extraneous and unnecessary to the *essential* work of life — economic growth, education, taxes — what if these fleeting encounters of wonder are actually the most significant moments in the whole of life? *Wonder* is closely linked to our ability to truly *worship*. God in his goodness and love for mankind has surrounded us with signposts, each one pointing us and inviting us into the wonder of his kingdom, to go deeper and deeper into the mysteries of his love. As the psalmist says, “The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork” (Ps 19:1). Are we listening?

Prayer for the Week

O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy: Be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways, and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of your Word, Jesus Christ your Son; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*


Reflective Practice

On the next clear night, go outside, lie on your back, and take in the wonder of God's heavenly creation.

Notes

FRIDAY

Learning to Linger

 Open Dwell and listen to Day 17
Psalm 19 | Exodus 19:9b-15 | Acts 7:30-40

Jesus is ever with the Father with the world upon his heart. May we think of our own prayer as being for a while consciously with the Father, no more and no less than that? ... The secret is the quest of God's presence: "Thy face Lord will I seek."

-MICHAEL RAMSEY

Have you ever driven through a dense fog? Few things are more difficult, requiring undivided attention and heightened alertness. And as a driver, you want out of the fog as quickly as possible, as you are acutely aware at every turn of the associated dangers. Undoubtedly, the safest thing to do is to stop and simply be present until it passes, yet this inefficient use of time means we usually press on and rarely acknowledge the reality of the situation. How often do we take this same approach to our life with God?

In Exodus 19, the Lord comes to his people in the form of a dense cloud. Why? "In order that the people may hear when I speak" (Ex 19:9). What if a cloud is meant to slow us down, not speed us up? In fact, what if it is not meant to be passed through at all, but is instead an invitation into stillness and silence? The nearness of God is never meant to confuse or distress but is an act of mercy and condescension into our weakness. He draws near in love, inviting us to linger in his presence.

Prayer for the Week

O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy: Be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways, and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of your Word, Jesus Christ your Son; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

Carve out 10-15 minutes of unhurried and unstructured time with the Lord in prayer. Resist the urge to check the time, glance at your phone, or mentally move on to the next thing. Choose instead to simply dwell in his presence, free of agenda or any motivation other than the nearness of God.

Notes

SATURDAY

Mountaintop Moments



Open Dwell and listen to Day 18

Psalm 19 | Exodus 19:16-25 | Mark 9:2-8

Firstly, prayer is a conversation between God and the soul, and secondly, a particular language is spoken: God's language. Prayer is dialogue, not man's monologue before God.

-HANS URS VON BALTHASAR

The story of the Transfiguration begins with an invitation and ends with a vision of God. Similarly, prayer is an invitation to follow Jesus as he leads us into the very presence of the Father. Invitation, response, encounter. This is the pattern of the Christian life seen throughout the Scriptures, yet nowhere as explicitly as the Transfiguration of Christ.

Just as Jesus led Peter, James, and John up the mountain to pray, he likewise draws near and invites you to follow him in the same way. On the mountain we see Jesus as he truly is and begin to learn the language of God. The Father reveals the Son and teaches us to live all of life in reference to Jesus. And as important and powerful as these “mountaintop moments” are in our life with God, we do not live on a mountain. No, day in and day out, we live in the mess and brokenness of a fallen world. Yet, we do so as people of great hope who have seen and tasted the life of the kingdom to come. Life on the mountain gives us the clarity needed to enter the valley.

Prayer for the Week

O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy: Be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways, and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of your Word, Jesus Christ your Son; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

Look at your calendar and over the next few weeks consider taking a 24-hour prayer retreat, not to escape from the world, but to have your life in the valley inspired and transformed by your encounter of the Lord on the mountain.

Notes

Third Sunday in Lent



SUNDAY

No Other Gods



Open Dwell and listen to Day 19

Exodus 20:1-17 | Psalm 19 | 1 Corinthians 1:18-25 | John 2:13-22

Grant me, above all else, to rest in You, that my heart may find its peace in You alone; for You are the heart's true peace, its sole abiding place, and outside Yourself all is hard and restless. In this true peace that is in You, the sole, supreme, and eternal Good, I will dwell and take my rest.

-THOMAS À KEMPIS

Idolatry is not a thing of the past. Though you may not have literal idols in your home that you venerate and worship, do not be too quick to dismiss the ancient words of the Lord: “You shall have no other gods before me” (Ex 20:3). While it is true that these words were spoken to a specific people in a historic context, the Ten Commandments offer ethical and moral guidance that invites each of us into the timeless wisdom of the kingdom of God.

What do you love? What do you want more than anything in the world? When given a moment to let your mind wander, to what or to whom does it turn? These questions and others like them provide insight into the gods that compete for your attention and compromise your singular devotion to Christ. Lent is a season of intentional identification. In prayer, take time to name these idols and bring them into submission and subordination to the rule and reign of Jesus.

Prayer for the Week

Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

What does idol worship look like in your life? Identify the relationships, possessions, or aspirations that threaten your devotion to Christ.

Notes

MONDAY

Begin to Build



Open Dwell and listen to Day 20

Psalm 84 | 1 Kings 6:1-4, 21-22 | 1 Corinthians 3:10-23

Love God, serve God; everything is in that.

-ST. CLARE OF ASSISI

Solomon had a vision for something that did not exist. He chose to give himself fully to a lifelong project, one that was informed by Israel's life with God over the centuries, yet more significantly, looked to the future and who they were meant to become. He was clear on the invitation before him from the Lord, to reestablish Israel as a people of single-hearted devotion to their God. And so, "He began to build the house of the Lord" (1 Kgs 6:1).

According to St. Paul, the glory of Solomon's temple is fulfilled in the Church, the temple within which the Spirit of God dwells (1 Cor 3:16). Personally and corporately, we therefore follow the example of Solomon when we choose each day to build our lives upon the foundation of Jesus Christ. This does not happen overnight or instantly but is a lifelong project. To build a legacy of faithfulness to Christ, we must pursue *sustained* attentiveness. Set your eyes on Jesus, and begin to see how life's daily joys and sorrows contribute to the bigger picture and grand narrative of our journey of faith.

Prayer for the Week

Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

Every daily decision and action builds your life in a specific direction. Tend to your daily actions and habits with a clear eye on where your story is headed.

Notes

TUESDAY

God Tells Long Stories



Open Dwell and listen to Day 21

Psalm 84 | 2 Chronicles 29:1-11, 16-19 | Hebrews 9:23-28

Live in faith and hope, though it be in darkness, for in this darkness God protects the soul. Cast your care upon God for you are His and He will not forget you.

-ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS

“How did we get here?” “How did this happen?” “What have I become?” Sometimes in life, we wake up and find ourselves asking questions such as these. Though we set out in one direction, somehow we got off course. The miscalculation may have been so subtle that it went unnoticed at the time, yet even the slightest deviation, when given time, can take us to places we never thought possible.

2 Chronicles 29 is a story of God’s people waking up to the reality of just how far they’d strayed. Long gone was the glory of Solomon’s temple, with idolatry and evil replacing holy fidelity to the Lord. This was not how the story was meant to end. Thankfully, for them and for us, God tells long stories. The invitation to begin again cannot be exhausted. The mercy of God knows no end. You are not broken beyond repair. The story of God brings light out of darkness, beauty from ashes, and life from death. Wherever you may have been yesterday, find your place in *this* story today.

Prayer for the Week

Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*


Reflective Practice

Whether in big ways or small, we all know the feeling of reaching the end of the rope. As you come to the end of yourself, can you choose to believe in the endless love and care of God for you?

Notes

WEDNESDAY

Turning Over Tables

 Open Dwell and listen to Day 22
Psalm 84 | Ezra 6:1-16 | Mark 11:15-19

We implore the mercy of God, not that He may leave us at peace in our vices, but that He may deliver us from them.

-BLAISE PASCAL

The peace of God sometimes requires great conflict. For God to dwell with us, the dwelling must first be made ready for his arrival, and this is often a painful and distressing process. Why? Because we grow attached to our brokenness and dependent upon disordered habits and desires. In fact, if we live in this place of delusion long enough, we likely will begin to convince ourselves that we aren't disordered at all!

The anger of Jesus in the Temple is not directed at people but at the sin that keeps them from living life as it is meant to be lived. Similarly, God's anger or wrath towards you is not directed at your humanity, but at the vices that keep you from being truly human. Jesus turns over tables, not for your harm, but for your good. He acts boldly and decisively to wake you up from the slumber of apathy. Our comfort with sin must be disrupted, and if we find ourselves unwilling and unable to undertake this work, Jesus in his mercy is able to do what we cannot do for ourselves.

Prayer for the Week

Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

Are you passionately angry at the sin in your life, or does it leave you deflated and defeated? Rather than finding comfort with its presence, how can you instead confront it head on and turn over a few tables?

Notes

THURSDAY

Give Thanks



Open Dwell and listen to Day 23

Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22 | Genesis 9:8-17 | Ephesians 1:3-6*No duty is more urgent than that of returning thanks.*

-ST. AMBROSE

The truth of God's goodness is not dependent on our response. The reality of his love is not determined by our willingness to accept or acknowledge it. God is love, full stop. As the Psalms remind us, "His steadfast love endures forever" (Ps 107:1). For all eternity, God's posture towards humanity is unwavering, unrelenting love. It is impossible for him to do otherwise. Therefore, he does not *need* our embrace of his love for this to be true, yet *our* response to his perfect love is the single-most important decision we can ever make.

We do not worship God for his sake, but for ours. God is not deficient or lacking in love, somehow needing our praise and thanksgiving to be made whole. No, *we* are the ones longing for healing and searching for wholeness. In the mystery of God's love, our healing is found in our ability to receive this love and offer it back to him in praise. Gratitude changes us. Thanksgiving sets us free. Worship rightly orders our hearts. And so, "Offer thanksgiving sacrifices, and tell of his deeds with songs of joy" (Ps 107:22).

Prayer for the Week

Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

Worship makes you whole and orients you to the rhythms of God’s kingdom. Take time today to worship the Lord privately, and as you are able, prioritize worship with the family of God this coming Sunday.

Notes

FRIDAY

Understanding God



Open Dwell and listen to Day 24

Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22 | Daniel 12:5-13 | Ephesians 1:7-14

*Grant me, O Lord my God, a mind to know you, a heart to seek you,
wisdom to find you, conduct pleasing to you, faithful perseverance in
waiting for you, and a hope of finally embracing you.*

-ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

It is entirely possible to have knowledge without understanding. Especially as it relates to the Christian faith, we live in a world that is saturated with knowledge. Answers to virtually every question of faith or theology are available on the phone that is likely with you at all times. This instant, if you so desire, you can watch countless hours of lectures from world-class academics, uncover archeological mysteries from around the world, and take virtual tours of the greatest cathedrals mankind has ever built. Yet, are you wise? Do you know how to live? Do you *understand*?

Faithful living begins with what we do not know. We acknowledge, like Daniel, that we hear but cannot understand (Dan 12:8). Do not be too quick to associate your knowledge *about* God with an encounter *of* God. Every pursuit of knowledge, every fact learned or experienced gained, must then be transformed into a life of prayer and communion with the Lord. Knowledge is never an end in and of itself but always points beyond, to the place where words fade away, and we *behold* the very light of God.

Prayer for the Week

Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

How have you conflated thoughts *about* God with *following* God, or *knowledge* of the Lord with an *encounter* of the life of Christ?

Notes

SATURDAY

Longing for Beauty



Open Dwell and listen to Day 25

Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22 | Numbers 20:22-29 | John 3:1-13

The eye must be fitted to the splendor: and it is not the wit of the man, but the spirit of the man; not so much his head as his heart, that learns the divine philosophy.

-JEREMY TAYLOR

As a child, and perhaps even as an adult, you likely remember attempting to stare at the sun. Though you knew in your head it was terrible for your vision and were immediately scolded by a parent or older sibling, you *longed* for the sun. Your heart *wanted* to see something that your head knew could not be seen.

In John 3, Nicodemus leads with his head, giving Jesus all the reasons why it is impossible to be born a second time. However, there is a previous, more fundamental question that Jesus longs for Nicodemus to ask. If you could, would you *want* to be born a second time? What if that longing, that deep, inescapable pull towards beauty, mystery, and wonder wasn't to be dismissed, but was an invitation to be transformed? What if there is a fulfillment to your deepest longings? Maybe there is a reason your heart longs to see the sun? Perhaps all that's lacking is eyes that are fit to see it. Or, as Jesus says, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above" (Jn 3:3).

Prayer for the Week

Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

Your deepest longings are meant to awaken you to the presence of God, not shut you down. Ask the Lord to give you an awareness of these longings and the ability to turn them towards Christ and the life of his kingdom.

Notes

Fourth Sunday in Lent



SUNDAY

Defeated by Death



Open Dwell and listen to Day 26

Numbers 21:4-9 | Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22 | Ephesians 2:1-10 | John 3:14-21

Trials and tribulations offer us a chance to make reparation for our past faults and sins. On such occasions the Lord comes to us like a physician to heal the wounds left by our sins. Tribulation is the divine medicine.

-ST. AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

With echos of the garden in Genesis, Numbers 21 tells of serpents that contribute to the destruction of God's people and the disordering of the Lord's good creation. From a place of unspeakable desperation, the people begged Moses, "Pray to the LORD to take away the serpents from us" (Num 21:7). The Lord responded, though in the most remarkable of ways. In order to be saved, they were told to look directly at their very source of sickness and death. Moses did not offer an ancient form of anti-venom, neither weapons of self-defense. No, the cure to serpents was...a golden snake.

In Lent, we journey into the wilderness, remembering that Israel's story is our own. *We* are overcome by death and long for freedom. And in this desperation, we see afresh how the Lord responds to these pleas for help. On the cross, death loses its power over us as it is defeated by death. And so with boldness St. John can say, "Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life" (Jn 3:14-15).

Prayer for the Week

Gracious Father, whose blessed Son Jesus Christ came down from heaven to be the true bread which gives life to the world: Evermore give us this bread, that he may live in us, and we in him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

Meditate on your greatest source of fear or anxiety in this current season. How does the cross of Christ invite hope into even the most difficult situations?

Notes

MONDAY

A Word of Welcome



Open Dwell and listen to Day 27

Psalm 107:1-16 | Exodus 15:22-27 | Hebrews 3:1-6

Man becomes an image of God not so much in the moment of solitude as in the moment of communion.

-POPE JOHN PAUL II

Deserts are known for what they lack, not for what they offer. By definition, a desert is unable to sustain human life. Food and water are the most obvious essential elements, yet the list does not stop there. In fact, it is entirely possible to quench your thirst and fill your belly, yet still live a desert-like existence. As Jesus reminds us, life is not sustained by bread alone but “by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Mt 4:4).

Communion with God is the satiation of our soul’s greatest desire. According to Psalm 107, our souls faint in the desert, longing for an “inhabited town” (Ps 107:4). Yes, a desert lacks food and water, but more fundamentally, it lacks *community*. It lacks the warmth of proximity, knowing and being known. The word spoken from the mouth of God is a word of welcome and belonging. It is an invitation into a family, into the only place where your thirst will be quenched and every hunger truly satisfied.

Prayer for the Week

Gracious Father, whose blessed Son Jesus Christ came down from heaven to be the true bread which gives life to the world: Evermore give us this bread, that he may live in us, and we in him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

Who are the other followers of Jesus with whom you share life in a regular and meaningful way? Choose today to step towards them by living in intentional and purposeful community.

Notes

TUESDAY

The Promised Land

 Open Dwell and listen to Day 28
Psalm 107:1-16 | Numbers 20:1-13 | 1 Corinthians 10:6-13

When all is said and done, the life of faith is nothing if not an unending struggle of the spirit with every available weapon against the flesh.

-DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

Our journey from the desert into the inhabited city of God is not instantaneous. Yes, in baptism we are made citizens of his glorious kingdom, given passports that secure a seat at his table. However, we have not yet arrived, and the journey is fraught with danger. If we lose sight of this, we will fail to see the momentary nature of our trials, and in the mystery of God's love, the way he uses these challenges to make us ready for our final destination.

In the depths of the desert, the Israelites lost sight of the Promised Land. Surely, the Lord had nothing to do with this wretched journey, or so they thought. The sorrow was too acute, the struggle too severe. Like all of us, they wanted to avoid pain and struggle, failing to see the refining hand of the Lord at work in the process. Difficult as it undoubtedly is, can we trust the Lord to "show his holiness" (Num 20:12) in the desert, or will we grow impatient and take matters into our own hands? Remember today, with every testing, the Lord provides a way out and a way to endure (1 Cor 10:13).

Prayer for the Week

Gracious Father, whose blessed Son Jesus Christ came down from heaven to be the true bread which gives life to the world: Evermore give us this bread, that he may live in us, and we in him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

Look for ways today to invite the Lord *into* your struggles, learning to follow him and encounter him where you are, not where you might wish to be.

Notes

WEDNESDAY

Capture the Moment



Open Dwell and listen to Day 29

Psalm 107:1-16 | Isaiah 60:15-22 | John 8:12-20

Let works of piety, therefore, be our delight, and let us be filled with those kinds of food which feed us for eternity.

-ST. LEO THE GREAT

In moments of great joy, have you at the same time ever felt a hint of sorrow, knowing the moment would soon come to an end? Perhaps it was your wedding reception, or when you took in a panoramic view of the sea, or a weekend reunion with a best friend after years apart. We simply do not want it to end! These experiences awaken something in us, a belief that life is more beautiful than we could have possibly dreamed. We want to capture these moments, bottle them up and preserve them before they vanish before our eyes.

These impulses are profoundly helpful to Christian discipleship, not because of the moments themselves, but because of the longing they awaken in us, the glory to which they point. Even the greatest parties come to an end, the sun finally sets, and vacations give way to the daily grind. Yet, each and every one of these experiences is a taste of eternity, pointing us to a joy and elation that will never end, for the Lord himself “will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory” (Is 60:19).

Prayer for the Week

Gracious Father, whose blessed Son Jesus Christ came down from heaven to be the true bread which gives life to the world: Evermore give us this bread, that he may live in us, and we in him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

Pay attention to the longings these moments of joy stir up within you, and take time to turn those desires towards the Lord in prayer.

Notes

THURSDAY

Enter His Rest



Open Dwell and listen to Day 30

Psalm 51:1-12 | Isaiah 30:15-18 | Hebrews 4:1-13

We know certainly that our God calls us to a holy life. We know that he gives us every grace, every abundant grace; and though we are so weak of ourselves, this grace is able to carry us through every obstacle and difficulty.

-ST. ELIZABETH ANN SETON

We do not know how to rest. As human beings living in the modern world, we are trained to invest in ways of life that bring the greatest perceived value, and rest does not *produce* a measurable good, and is therefore easily dismissed. Similarly, resting requires a posture of reception, inviting us to surrender our defenses and let down our guard. In a culture void of all trust and vulnerability, this difficulty often proves to be an insurmountable obstacle.

For the follower of Jesus, rest is not optional, neither is quiet humility a source of weakness or shame. In fact, these virtues are *essential* to the Lord's plan of salvation, for "In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength" (Is 30:15). Rest is the reward for a life of faithful struggle. It is entry into the perfect peace of our Lord, and so we work with all our might to become people defined by rest. Or, as the author of Hebrews puts it, "Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest" (Heb 4:11).

Prayer for the Week

Gracious Father, whose blessed Son Jesus Christ came down from heaven to be the true bread which gives life to the world: Evermore give us this bread, that he may live in us, and we in him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*


Reflective Practice

Rest does not happen to us accidentally. Choose today to *contend* for it, resisting the impulse towards constant production and productivity.

Notes

FRIDAY

A New Heart

 Open Dwell and listen to Day 31
Psalm 51:1-12 | Exodus 30:1-10 | Hebrews 4:14-5:4

We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.

-C.S. LEWIS

Our world loves to swim on the surface. Superficiality feels safe, predictable, even controllable. Yet behind every perfectly manipulated image or carefully crafted post is an unseen world of hopes and dreams, joys and fears, temptations and insecurities. As men and women made in the image of God, we are infinitely complex creatures. However, this capacity for the infinite must be carefully tended, called out, and nurtured.

The wisdom of God is meant to penetrate our highly curated facades and renew us in the depths of our being. Though this “truth in the inward being,” as the psalmist calls it (Ps 51:6), is not easily gained, neither is it easily lost. The cleansing touch of the Lord is not easily forgotten. A heart genuinely purged by his love and kindness longs to abide in the presence of his Spirit. In his goodness, the Lord reminds us of what is real and true, that we are divine creatures made for eternity, and though the sickness runs deep, deeper still is his healing touch. Do not settle for a superficial faith.

Prayer for the Week

Gracious Father, whose blessed Son Jesus Christ came down from heaven to be the true bread which gives life to the world: Evermore give us this bread, that he may live in us, and we in him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*


Reflective Practice

As a human being made in the image of God, you have unspeakable value and worth. In what ways do you betray this dignity by contenting yourself with frivolous pursuits that distract from your ability to abide in the presence of the Lord?

Notes

SATURDAY

Remember the Future

 Open Dwell and listen to Day 32
Psalm 51:1-12 | Habakkuk 3:2-13 | John 12:1-11

Remember Whose you are and Whom you serve. Provoke yourself by recollection, and your affection for God will increase tenfold; your imagination will not be starved any longer, but will be quick and enthusiastic, and your hope will be inexpressibly bright.

-OSWALD CHAMBERS

Without a living memory of God's faithfulness in the past, we will be uprooted and disoriented in the present and lack clarity and hope for the future. If our present struggles are not placed within their historical context, every challenge will be a crisis, and every difficulty a cause for desolation. Especially in our digital age, with an endless stream of content by the minute, spiritual and cultural amnesia is a real and present danger.

Knowledge of God's faithfulness to his people in the past also inspires and animates the prayer life of his children in the present. The progression of devotion in Habakkuk 3 is worthy of mention. "O Lord, I have heard of your renown, and I stand in awe, O Lord, of your work. In our own time revive it" (Hab 3:2). Remembrance. Worship. Longing. Learning the story from the past, standing in awe and gratitude for his faithfulness, and looking ahead to the promise of his coming kingdom. Or, as Christians have summarized for centuries, "Christ *has* died, Christ *is* risen, Christ *will* come again."

Prayer for the Week

Gracious Father, whose blessed Son Jesus Christ came down from heaven to be the true bread which gives life to the world: Evermore give us this bread, that he may live in us, and we in him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

Genesis recalls the origins of God's faithfulness to his people, Revelation looks ahead with hope to the coming kingdom, and the Psalms invite an intimate, lived experience of God in the present. Consider a habit of reading small portions of all 3 books as a way to look back, forward, and to dwell with God in the present.

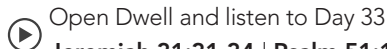
Notes

Fifth Sunday in Lent



SUNDAY

Learning to Pray



Open Dwell and listen to Day 33

Jeremiah 31:31-34 | Psalm 51:1-12 | Hebrews 5:5-10 | John 12:20-33

We can convert our unceasing thinking into unceasing prayer by making our inner monologue into a continuing dialogue with our God, who is the source of all love.

-HENRI NOUWEN

Do you believe God hears and responds to your prayers? Don't rush past this question. Breathe it in. Reflect honestly and openly on your life of prayer. What sorts of things do you pray about? *Do* you pray to the Lord, believing he hears and responds to your requests? Are your prayers born out of a life of daily communion with him, or are they only offered in times of acute need or severe trial?

Our actions are the most consistent indicators of our deepest convictions and beliefs. More than what we say or think, what we *do* largely informs who we *are*. Today, Hebrews reminds us that Jesus not only *believed* in the power of prayer, but *lived* this belief as he modeled a life of complete dependence on the Father. He “offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death” (Heb 5:7). Knowledge isolated from obedience is not true discipleship. Jesus *knew* the source of salvation, and that knowledge informed and inspired his way of *life*. Let us learn to follow him and do the same.

Prayer for the Week

Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

Take an audit of your prayer life. Do you pray in consistent and predictable ways, or only when faced with felt needs? Consider a daily time with the Lord in prayer as a way to encourage a relationship and way of life with Christ.

Notes

MONDAY

A Guarded Life



Open Dwell and listen to Day 34

Psalm 119:9-16 | Isaiah 43:8-13 | 2 Corinthians 3:4-11

Even in the greatest afflictions, we ought to testify to God, that, in receiving them from his hand, we feel pleasure in the midst of the pain, from being afflicted by Him who loves us, and whom we love.

-JOHN WESLEY

Discipline is a multidimensional word. It can have a highly negative connotation, seen as a harsh rebuke or cruel punishment. This is likely the first definition that comes to mind. Interestingly, this is *not* the principle way discipline is viewed in Scripture. In the life of the believer, discipline is both a gift from God and a way of life to be *pursued* and *desired*.

As we are reminded in Scripture, “The Lord disciplines those whom he loves” (Heb 12:6). If God is pure love, which he is, then the discipline of the Lord must fundamentally arise from this heart of love. God’s discipline springs forth from his great compassion and care. It is for our *good*. How? His discipline illumines the path before us. It centers us when we are prone to drift. It shows us the way when we have lost sight of the goal. A disciplined life is a well-ordered life. In the language of the Psalms, it is a “guarded life” (Ps 119:9), a life that does not stray from the commands of God but keeps to the center of his will, knowing it is there that true joy is found.

Prayer for the Week

Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

In the name of freedom, where have you let your guard down and invited sin and sickness into the intimate spaces of your life?

Notes

TUESDAY

Channels of Grace



Open Dwell and listen to Day 35

Psalm 119:9-16 | Isaiah 44:1-8 | Acts 2:14-24

It is very important to remember that prayer is an encounter and a relationship, a relationship which is deep, and this relationship cannot be forced either on us or on God.

-ANTHONY BLOOM

You cannot force the hand of God, but you *can* increase your likelihood of encountering him. The Lord is not a divine genie in a bottle, passively waiting to be summoned on demand. That said, he *wants* to be found. God *desires* relationship with you, to be known by his creation. This is the unchanging, unwavering disposition of God towards his people. If we struggle to encounter him, might it be that *we* are the ones who are distant and distracted, not him?

The Lord is inviting us to awaken from our inattentiveness. If we want to know him, we must be willing to go to the places he has promised to be: Word. Sacrament. Prayer. Community. These are the channels of grace, the streams of living water that God pours out upon the thirsty land of our hearts (Is 44:3). His divine life is on offer, yet he does not force himself upon us. We must learn to receive him and intentionally pursue him. We cannot control or create the water, but we *can* place ourselves in the stream bed.

Prayer for the Week

Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

How does God’s desire for you shape your openness to pursuing him and receiving his life as your own?

Notes

WEDNESDAY

God Stories



Open Dwell and listen to Day 36

Psalm 119:9-16 | Haggai 2:1-9, 20-23 | John 12:34-50

We are not on earth as museum keepers, but to cultivate a flourishing garden of life and to prepare a glorious future.

-POPE JOHN XXIII

How old are your God stories? When speaking of the Lord's faithfulness in your life, do you speak in the present tense, or is it only in reference to a moment from the distant past? Christian memory is essential to faithful living, offering continuity to our story and journey with God. Especially in wilderness seasons, we must call to mind his faithfulness in the past. However, this cannot be the *exclusive* posture of our lives. Just as God was known in the past, he longs to fill us with his life in the present.

Without an abiding relationship with Christ, faith becomes a form of nostalgia. We long for the good old days when life was simple and everything made sense (or so we think). To borrow language from Haggai, we are tempted to reflect longingly on the "former glory" of the house of God (Hag 2:3). The danger of nostalgic faith is it keeps our heads turned the wrong way. One cannot focus on two things at the same time, and how tragic it would be if our longing for the former glory robbed us of the hope and anticipation of "the latter splendor" (Hag 2:9).

Prayer for the Week

Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

Does your life with Christ look like a museum that you curate, or a garden that you cultivate?

Notes

THURSDAY (ANNUNCIATION OF THE LORD)

The Lord is With You



Open Dwell and listen to Day 37

Isaiah 7:10-14 | Psalm 45 | Hebrews 10:4-10 | Luke 1:26-38

For next to God, we worship and love the Word who is from the unbegotten and ineffable God, since also He became man for our sakes, that becoming a partaker of our sufferings, He might also bring us healing.

-ST. JUSTIN MARTYR

Is there anything more disorienting than listening to Christmas music out of season? Songs that provide untold joy and happiness for one month of the year somehow evoke the opposite emotions for the other eleven! In light of this, you might struggle at first glance to understand and appreciate why today, in the depths of the Lenten season, Christians around the world take time to reflect upon the angel's announcement to the Virgin Mary of the birth of Christ. Christmas...in Lent?

While a biological rationale can be provided, as we are exactly nine months from Christmas Day, there is a profound theological point that cannot be missed. To celebrate the Annunciation in Lent is to remember that God is with us in our time of greatest need. As we contend *against* evil and *for* the kingdom, we remember that God is with us in this battle. The angel Gabriel told Mary, "The Lord is with you" (Lk 1:28), and in so doing announced hope and healing for a desperate world. Do you believe this same promise is available to you today?

Prayer for The Annunciation

Pour your grace into our hearts, O Lord, that we who have known the incarnation of your Son Jesus Christ, announced by an angel to the Virgin Mary, may by his cross and passion be brought to the glory of his resurrection; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

Take time today in prayer to thank the Lord that he is with us in the depths of our pain, leading us into places of peace.

Notes

FRIDAY

My Own Faults



Open Dwell and listen to Day 38

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29 | Jeremiah 33:1-9 | Philippians 2:12-18

Yes, Lord and King, grant me to see my own faults and not to judge my brothers and sisters.

-ST. EPHRAIM THE SYRIAN

Rarely do we think we are in the wrong. When faced with conflict at work or relational tensions at home, we are convinced that everything would resolve if people would simply come around to *our* point of view. If only they saw what we saw, surely they'd accept the error of their ways! It requires no virtue to see the faults in others. To see our own faults? That is nothing less than an act of God.

Our perceived virtues are reframed in light of the radical humility of God. If ever someone was justified in a claim of correctness, it was Jesus Christ. And yet, at every turn he chose humility. When given the option, he took the lowest seat. Not once did he act out of self-preservation or self-interest. Every thought and every action was perfectly directed towards the good of the other and *their* restoration, even when it came at great personal expense. False humility keeps silent while secretly assuming superiority. A life transformed by the example of Jesus and the abiding presence of the Spirit is able to do the impossible: “Regard others as better than yourselves” (Phil 2:3).

Prayer for the Week

Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

Try to go a full 24 hours without speaking negatively or pointing out the faults in someone else. You may find it's harder than you think!

Notes

SATURDAY

The Lord Has Made



Open Dwell and listen to Day 39

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29 | Jeremiah 33:10-16 | Mark 10:32-34, 46-52

You, Master almighty, created all things for Your name's sake; You gave food and drink to men for enjoyment, that they might give thanks to You; but to us You freely gave spiritual food and drink and life eternal through Your Servant.

-THE DIDACHE

Creation is not a singular event but is the ever-present reality of the sustaining love of God. God breathed his life out upon his creation in the beginning, and that same creative force is at work this very moment. God both created *and creates* the heavens and the earth. The breath you just took is a sign of the ongoing creativity of God. This very moment was fashioned and formed by his creative power. He spoke this day into being and sustains your every movement. And just like the original creation story, he looks at what he has created today and says *it is good*.

We are not self-made women and men. Life does not originate with you, and you are not your own creation. Yet, God in his kindness welcomes us into the beautiful story he is telling. He breathes his life into us and invites us to join him in the eternal dance of his creative love. And so, with wonder and amazement, we join our voices with the psalmist and say, “This is the day that *the Lord has made*; let us rejoice and be glad in it” (Ps 118:24).

Prayer for the Week

Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

No matter what your circumstances may be, take time today and give thanks to the Lord for the *gift* of life and this new day that he has created and called *good*.

Notes

Holy Week



PALM SUNDAY

The God Who Saves



Open Dwell and listen to Day 40

Liturgy of the Palms: Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29 | Mark 11:1-11 Liturgy of the Passion: Isaiah 50:4-9a | Psalm 31:9-16 | Philippians 2:5-11 | Mark 14:1-15:47

It was not God's pleasure to give an earthly kingdom to the powerful, but a heavenly kingdom to the gentle.

—THE VENERABLE BEDE

Palm Sunday invites us into a place of incredible tension and apparent contradiction. We turn our hearts and minds towards Jerusalem, celebrating the triumphal entry of the King. However, we do so as people who have seen the scandal and shame of the cross. This revolutionary ruler reveals to a world, drunk on its own success and self-preservation, the nature of *true* power. The way of glory is found in gentle submission. Humility and self-giving love are the singular paths to victory and freedom.

The movement of Holy Week is a pattern upon which we must build our entire lives. Our destination is the empty tomb. We are bound for glory. However, the way of death is the way of life. Salvation is impossible without sacrifice. We must hold together that which we constantly seek to fragment and tear apart. Good Friday is *good* only in light of Easter Sunday. The joy of Easter comes only by way of the cross. And so today, with the cross and resurrection before us, we join our voices with the crowds and say, “Hosanna, *you* are the God who saves us.”

Prayer for Palm Sunday

Almighty and everliving God, in your tender love for the human race you sent your Son our Savior Jesus Christ to take upon him our nature, and to suffer death upon the cross, giving us the example of his great humility: Mercifully grant that we may walk in the way of his suffering, and also share in his resurrection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*


Reflective Practice

As the world thirsts for power and dominance, how can you model the subversive way of simplicity and humility in the small and often unseen rhythms of your daily life?

Notes

MONDAY IN HOLY WEEK

The Shadow of the Cross

 Open Dwell and listen to Day 41
Isaiah 42:1-9 | Psalm 36:5-11 | Hebrews 9:11-15 | John 12:1-11

Many people say that the Christian life is unpleasant and difficult; I say that it is most pleasant and easy. But it requires two prerequisites: humility and love.

-ST. PORPHYRIOS

Your personal salvation is not the end of God’s story of redemption. Yes, the Scriptures are filled with accounts of God’s faithfulness to specific men and women, bringing them out of the darkness and into the light of his love. However, just as God created the world in its entirety, it is his desire to see the *whole* of creation healed and restored. If this is not our understanding of the Christian life, our vision of salvation may be too small.

In a single breath, Isaiah 42 holds in perfect tension the personal and corporate dimensions of redemption. To each one of us, the Lord takes us by the hand and keeps us safe *so that* we can be “a light to the nations” (Is 42:6). If the good news you believe and live is not good news for your neighbor and neighborhood, is it truly good news? As we walk towards Good Friday, we remember today that it is in the Passion of Christ that we see the fulfillment of the Psalms, for in the shadow of the cross *all people* are invited to take refuge underneath his wings (Ps 36:7).

Prayer for Monday in Holy Week

Almighty God, whose dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain, and entered not into glory before he was crucified: Mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross, may find it none other than the way of life and peace; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

As you follow Jesus and are filled with his life, allow that personal transformation to spill over into love and acts of service for the sake of others.

Notes

Tuesday in Holy Week

Rock of Refuge



Open Dwell and listen to Day 42

Isaiah 49:1-7 | Psalm 71:1-14 | 1 Corinthians 1:18-31 | John 12:20-36

The first stage of this tranquility consists in silencing the lips when the heart is excited. The second, in silencing the mind when the soul is still excited. The goal is a perfect peacefulness even in the middle of the raging storm.

-ST. JOHN CLIMACUS

Refuge is needed in the midst of a great storm, not under clear skies or while sailing peaceful waters. When lost at sea, salvation comes either by removing yourself *from* the danger, or by a stronger force entering *into* the raging sea with you. Holy Week is a story of entry into chaos, *not* victory by retreat. Christ did not send us to the shore for safety but entered into the madness of our world and waged a holy battle.

Make no mistake about it: though he was led like a lamb to the slaughter (Is 53:7), Jesus Christ was not led *against his will* to his passion and death. Our Lord obediently ascended the cross as a victorious conqueror, placing himself at the heart of the storm in order to establish a rock of refuge and a fortress of impenetrable safety for all who draw near (Ps 71:3). And while his victory is certain and the outcome secured, we must never forget the depths to which he descended in order to set us free.

Prayer for Tuesday in Holy Week

O God, by the passion of your blessed Son you made an instrument of shameful death to be for us the means of life: Grant us so to glory in the cross of Christ, that we may gladly suffer shame and loss for the sake of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

Where have you been trying to flee to the shore for safety when the Lord is instead asking you to steady yourself and encounter his victory *in the storm*?

Notes

WEDNESDAY IN HOLY WEEK

An Enduring Faith



Open Dwell and listen to Day 43

Isaiah 50:4-9a | Psalm 70 | Hebrews 12:1-3 | John 13:21-32

Patient endurance kills the despair that kills the soul; it teaches the soul to take comfort and not to grow listless in the face of its many battles and afflictions.

-ST. PETER OF DAMASKOS

Are you teachable? In the truest sense of the word, do you awaken daily to the belief that you are lacking in direction and purpose apart from the Spirit of God filling you with his life? Often, from a place of insecurity or perceived inadequacy, we overcompensate and attempt to convince ourselves (and others) that we are strong and independent creatures. And while this temptation is understandable, it is toxic to our Christian faith. Remember, we never leave behind our position as students under the Word of God. We daily listen “as those who are taught” (Is 50:4).

The life of discipleship has more in common with a training field than it does a lecture hall. Our ears are opened and we are *trained*, not simply taught. Our thoughts *about* the Lord must begin to form our life *with* the Lord. As the author of Hebrews encourages us, we must “run with perseverance the race that is set before us” (Heb 12:1). With Good Friday approaching, today we remember that this faithful endurance is found as we look to the cross, for there alone we encounter the joy and victory of God that triumphs over shame.

Prayer for Wednesday in Holy Week

Lord God, whose blessed Son our Savior gave his body to be whipped and his face to be spit upon: Give us grace to accept joyfully the sufferings of the present time, confident of the glory that shall be revealed; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

Do you have a “training routine” that helps you move from *thinking* about the life of God to truly *living* with Christ? Effort is not opposed to grace but is our faithful response to the work of God in our lives.

Notes

MAUNDY THURSDAY

Concrete Love



Open Dwell and listen to Day 44

**Exodus 12:1-14 | Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19 | 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 |
John 13:1-17, 31b-35**

While we are commanded to offer tithes of our substance and all our fruits, it is much more needful for us to offer tithes of our life and ordinary employments and actions.

-ST. JOHN CASSIAN

Maundy Thursday, which draws its name from the Latin for “new commandment,” *mandatum novum*, is the day in which the Church recalls Jesus announcing in advance the meaning and message of the cross. Love defined by self-giving service is the aim of the Christian life. Jesus proclaims this as the way of life, sets it forth as the path for his disciples, and then proceeds to walk it himself. “Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another” (Jn 13:34).

Jesus will never ask you to journey down a road that he himself has not walked. There is never a moment in which you are left without example. Love applies affection in concrete acts of humility. Jesus *said* weakness was the way, and then *enacted* the radical values of the kingdom before their very eyes. The uncreated Son of God, through whom all things were made, “got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself” (Jn 13:4). Give your life away *concretely* for your brother or sister, for in so doing you will discover the freedom of sacrificial love.

Prayer for Maundy Thursday

Almighty Father, whose dear Son, on the night before he suffered, instituted the Sacrament of his Body and Blood: Mercifully grant that we may receive it thankfully in remembrance of Jesus Christ our Lord, who in these holy mysteries gives us a pledge of eternal life; and who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*


Reflective Practice

Who are the *specific* people in your life that the Lord is asking you to love in concrete ways? Pick up the servant's towel, and commit yourself to washing their feet in love, just as Christ has loved you.

Notes

GOOD FRIDAY

Purged With Hyssop

 Open Dwell and listen to Day 45
Isaiah 52:13-53:12 | Psalm 22 | Hebrews 10:16-25 | John 18:1-19:42

It is not only that joy will take the place of sorrow, but the sorrow itself becomes the joy. The Cross is not for Christians a stumbling-block which the Resurrection has removed; it is not a defeat of which the effect has been cancelled by a subsequent victory. It is itself the triumph. What was the devil's worst has become God's best.

-WILLIAM TEMPLE

Hyssop. With a single word, John's gospel ties together the story of Scripture, revealing the fulfillment of God's ancient promises to his people. This word is mentioned roughly a dozen times in the Bible, and though it is a seemingly small and insignificant plant (1 Kgs 4:33), it is often connected to the priestly ministry of purification, as well as the famous line from Psalm 51:7, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean." Yet most significantly, hyssop is central to the Passover, for it was with hyssop that the Israelites marked their doorposts with blood (Ex 12:22). Hundreds of years later, hyssop was again lifted high, this time with sour wine dripping from a sponge (Jn 19:29).

The story of the Exodus is the story of the cross. The cross is God's offering of himself to bring us out of slavery, once and for all. Abraham's trust in the Lord finds its true fulfillment on the cross, for here the Lord has provided the sacrificial lamb (Gen 22:14). Good Friday, even in its horror, sorrow, and shame, is nothing less than a passage to freedom and the beginning of a new world.

Prayer for Good Friday

Almighty God, we pray you graciously to behold this your family, for whom our Lord Jesus Christ was willing to be betrayed, and given into the hands of sinners, and to suffer death upon the cross; who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

Take time today to read the story of the Passover from Exodus 12, yet read it through the lens of the cross of Christ and God's definitive action to free his people from their slavery to sin and death.

Notes

HOLY SATURDAY

The Space Between



Open Dwell and listen to Day 46

Job 14:1-14 | Psalm 31:1-4, 15-16 | 1 Peter 4:1-8 | Matthew 27:57-66

Love is the victor. Death is not the end. The end is life. His life and our lives through him, in him. Existence has greater depths of beauty, mystery, and benediction than the wildest visionary has ever dared to dream.

-FREDERICK BUECHNER

It is our tendency to rush through seasons of difficulty. We want to pass through the pain as quickly as possible, hoping to minimize its lasting effects. In a sense, we rush from Good Friday to Easter Sunday, skipping over the harrowing silence of Holy Saturday in the process. Today, we are invited to wait, to join our Lord in the in-between. In this sense, Holy Saturday is where we live the majority of our lives.

Transformation is found in the space between death and life. We have seen the scandal of the cross, yet still await the victory of Easter. Life is spent between the cross and glory, believing this death will give way to a birth, to new and unending life. The tree that is cut down, Job reminds us, “will sprout again, and its shoots will not cease” (Job 14:7). And so, we sit with the discomfort of transformation, believing that morning always follows night. Or, as our Lord Jesus taught us, “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (Jn 12:24).

Prayer for Holy Saturday

O God, Creator of heaven and earth: Grant that, as the crucified body of your dear Son was laid in the tomb and rested on this holy Sabbath, so we may await with him the coming of the third day, and rise with him to newness of life; who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

In what ways are you tempted to rush the process of transformation? On this Holy Saturday, can you remain with Christ in the tomb, believing shoots of new life will soon spring forth?


Notes

Easter



EASTER SUNDAY

A Gate to Freedom

 Open Dwell and listen to Day 47
Acts 10:34-43 | Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24 | 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 |
John 20:1-18

A fiery sword barred of old the gates of Paradise; a fiery tongue which brought salvation restored the gift.

—ST. CYRIL OF JERUSALEM

We push against the idea of boundaries, believing they limit our enjoyment of life and true self-expression. The only problem with this is that Jesus sought to re-establish boundaries everywhere he went, calling out our upside-down sense of freedom in the process. The Prodigal Son rejected the boundaries of family, only to return and discover the freedom of life with his father. The sheep left the boundary of the pen, yet was found by a shepherd who pursued it and restored it to the flock. It is *within* the walls of the kingdom, not without, that we discover who we were made to be.

Death is the ancient enemy that breached the walls and compromised the integrity of our world. On the cross, Jesus defeated death through his own death, and in his resurrection he definitely restored the boundaries compromised by humankind's quest for autonomy. And so, on this glorious Easter Sunday, with our hearts set on that heavenly kingdom, we join our voices with the psalmist and pray, "Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the LORD" (Ps 118:19).

Prayer for Easter Day

O God, who for our redemption gave your only-begotten Son to the death of the cross, and by his glorious resurrection delivered us from the power of our enemy: Grant us so to die daily to sin, that we may evermore live with him in the joy of his resurrection; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Reflective Practice

Easter is the triumph of God over every enemy that stands in opposition to his kingdom. Such a victory cannot be limited to a single day of celebration but is instead an extended fifty-day season. Having walked the long road of Lent, enter now into the joy and delight of resurrection life!

Notes

The Nicene Creed

I believe in one God, Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages; Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten, not created, of one essence with the Father through Whom all things were made. Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became man. He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered and was buried; And He rose on the third day, according to the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father; And He will come again with glory to judge the living and dead. His kingdom shall have no end.

And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Creator of life, Who proceeds from the Father, Who together with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, Who spoke through the prophets.

In one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.

I confess one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the age to come.

Amen.

Endnotes

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