

LENTEN DEVOTIONAL GUIDE



THE CHURCH OF THE ASCENSION
DAILY READINGS AND MEDITATIONS FOR LENT 2010

COLLECT FOR LENT

*Almighty and eternal God,
you hate nothing that you have made,
and forgive the sins of all those 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. Amen.*

THE LENTEN JOURNEY

All of us organize our lives according to seasons. While some follow the rhythms of the school year, others operate on financial quarters or electoral cycles. The Church is no exception. Since the death and resurrection of Jesus, the Church has shaped her calendar according to the events associated with God's redemption of the world in Christ. The calendar guides us through seasons of anticipation and longing, repentance and grief, joy and gladness for the purpose of bringing us into a deeper encounter with the love of God.

The early church saw the time leading up to the celebration of Christ's death and resurrection as a time to return to the basics of our faith. This season became known as Lent and has been a hallmark of Christian spirituality for centuries. Lent is a journey that reminds us of what it means to turn from sin, die to self, and rely solely on Christ. We turn from spiritual death, our pride and selfish desires, to put on joy, humility, and love, as we look in faith to Jesus, whose death conquers the power of sin. Obviously, this is not an overnight journey. To allow us an appropriate amount of time, Lent runs forty days up to Easter (Sundays are excluded as "Sabbaths" from the fast).

In the Book of Common Prayer, the Lenten collect sums up the themes of the season by asking God to "Create and make in us new and contrite hearts." There are three important things in this request. First, Lent is a time of repentance. Sin clouds over our lives. Even though believers have entered into fellowship with Christ, we still struggle with sin. During Lent we reflect on how deeply this sin penetrates our thoughts, words and deeds. We come to the realization that our only hope is to cry out to God to forgive us and transform us through his Son.

Second, in Lent we go through a process of changing our appetites. Too often we attempt to satisfy our hunger with anything other than Jesus. Whether achievements, relationships, power, or moral causes, we look to all sorts of things to feed our souls. Lent reminds us that the only way to be truly filled is when our appetites are completely changed and we feast upon Christ, the bread of heaven. When our appetites are changed, we can celebrate him and his body, our sustenance.

Third, Lent instills in us a longing for a renewed relationship with God. This renewal is only possible as we replace pride with humility. We can never purify ourselves enough to approach God. Instead, Lent gives us the opportunity to meditate on how utterly dependent on Christ we are and how impossible it is to have communion with God apart from him. In this humility, we long for the renewal and life that the Resurrection represents.

Traditionally, the themes of the Lenten journey have been expressed in the actions of prayer, fasting and almsgiving. These actions provide us

with opportunities to repent of our self-dependence and turn to dependence on Christ. Through prayer, we can renew our relationship with God. In fasting, we deprive ourselves of things that may distract us from him. Almsgiving prevents us from becoming self-centered and calls us to look to the needs of those around us.

This journey is not for the faint of heart. But, as Christians, this yearly season is an integral part of our spiritual lives. Our desire is to be united to God. Through the journey of Lent we come to a deeper appreciation of what Christ has done for us and that he alone is the way, the truth, and the life.

DAILY READINGS FROM LUKE

For the season of Lent, we are encouraging our parish to read and reflect on what it means to be a disciple of Jesus in the modern world. Our readings follow Jesus' journey from a Samaritan village where "he set his face to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51) to his anguished cries on the cross (Luke 23:46). On the road to his death, Jesus instructs his disciples about matters essential to being a true citizen of his kingdom. The readings cover the forty days of Lent (Monday-Saturday) and the Sundays of the season.

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| Ash Wednesday, February 17: | Luke 9:51-62 |
| Thursday, February 18: | Luke 10:1-20 |
| Friday, February 19: | Luke 10:21-24 |
| Saturday, February 20: | Luke 10:25-37 |
| Sunday, February 21: | Luke 10:38-42 |
| Monday, February 22: | Luke 11:1-13 |
| Tuesday, February 23: | Luke 11:14-26 |
| Wednesday, February 24: | Luke 11:27-28 |
| Thursday, February 25: | Luke 11:29-36 |
| Friday, February 26: | Luke 11:37-54 |
| Saturday, February 27: | Luke 12:1-12 |
| Sunday, February 28: | Luke 12:13-21 |
| Monday, March 1: | Luke 12:22-34 |
| Tuesday, March 2: | Luke 12:35-48 |
| Wednesday, March 3: | Luke 12:49-59 |
| Thursday, March 4: | Luke 13:1-10 |
| Friday, March 5: | Luke 13:11-17 |
| Saturday, March 6: | Luke 13:18-21 |
| Sunday, March 7: | Luke 13:22-30 |
| Monday, March 8: | Luke 13:31-35 |
| Tuesday, March 9: | Luke 14:1-11 |
| Wednesday, March 10: | Luke 14:12-24 |
| Thursday, March 11: | Luke 14:25-33 |
| Friday, March 12: | Luke 14:34-35 |
| Saturday, March 13: | Luke 15:1-10 |
| Sunday, March 14: | Luke 15:11-32 |
| Monday, March 15: | Luke 16:1-13 |

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| Tuesday, March 16: | Luke 16:14-31 |
| Wednesday, March 17: | Luke 17:1-6 |
| Thursday, March 18: | Luke 17:7-10 |
| Friday, March 19: | Luke 17:11-19 |
| Saturday, March 20: | Luke 17:20-37 |
| Sunday, March 21: | Luke 18:1-8 |
| Monday, March 22: | Luke 18:9-14 |
| Tuesday, March 23: | Luke 18:15-17 |
| Wednesday, March 24: | Luke 18:18-30 |
| Thursday, March 25: | Luke 18:31-43 |
| Friday, March 26: | Luke 19:1-10 |
| Saturday, March 27: | Luke 19:11-27 |
| Palm Sunday, March 28: | Luke 19:28-48 |
| Holy Monday, March 29: | Luke 20:1-16 |
| Holy Tuesday, March 30: | Luke 20:27-47 |
| Holy Wednesday, March 31: | Luke 21:1-22:6 |
| Maundy Thursday, April 1: | Luke 22:7-65 |
| Good Friday, April 2: | Luke 22:66-23:56 |
| Holy Saturday, April 3 | |
| Easter Sunday, April 4: | Luke 24:1-49 |

A SIMPLE WAY TO PRAY

Following is a format for *lectio divina*, or “divine reading,” to assist you with the scripture readings. The purpose is to foster daily communion with God through reading, reflection and prayer. We encourage you to set apart 20-25 minutes to get the most out of this exercise.

PREPARING THE HEART

Read one of the selected passages below to gather your thoughts. Acknowledge the presence of God, contemplate his character, and recall his gracious redemption of you. As these truths collect your attention, offer brief prayers of praise and thanksgiving to God. If you are pre-occupied, acknowledge this to God. Confess any anxieties or worries stealing your attention. Ask God to grant you focus and rest.

Psalm 9:9-10 The Lord is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. And those who know your name put their trust in you, for you, O Lord, have not forsaken those who seek you.

Psalm 27:4-5 One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple. For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will lift me high upon a rock.

Psalm 59:16-17 I will sing of your strength; I will sing aloud of your steadfast love in the morning. For you have been to me a fortress and a refuge in the day of my distress. O my Strength, I will sing praises to you, for you, O God, are my fortress, the God who shows me steadfast love.

Psalm 86:4-6 Gladden the soul of your servant, for to you, O Lord, do I lift up my soul. For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you. Give ear, O Lord, to my prayer; listen to my plea for grace.

Psalm 103:1-4 Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy.

Psalm 107:1, 9 Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever! For he satisfies the longing soul, and the hungry soul he fills with good things.

Psalm 116:5-7 Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; our God is merciful. The Lord preserves the simple; when I was brought low, he saved me. Return, O my soul, to your rest; for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you.

READING THE SCRIPTURES

Read the entire passage from the Gospel of Luke assigned for the day. Note the overall emphasis of the passage. Ask yourself these questions:

- ❖ *What do I learn about Jesus? Who is he? What has he done for my salvation?*
- ❖ *What do I learn about myself or the human condition?*
- ❖ *What do I learn about how I am to live?*
 - *Examples to avoid or follow*
 - *Commands to obey*
 - *Promises to claim*

After grasping the purpose of the passage, read it quietly and slowly a second, and even a third time. When something catches your attention, read it again. Dwell on the words. Repeat them out loud. The purpose of this time is to weigh and taste the truth.

REFLECTING ON THE SCRIPTURES

As you read, note the verse, phrase, or idea that resonates with you or challenges you and take time to meditate on it. The purpose is to bring the mind, filled with the truth of God, into contact with the heart. To prompt your reflection, consider these questions:

- ❖ *Why is the Holy Spirit bringing this to my attention today?*
- ❖ *How would I be different if this truth was alive in my inner being?*
- ❖ *What wrong thoughts, words, or deeds do I fall into when I fail to live in light of this truth?*
- ❖ *How is Jesus the ultimate answer to these things? How does he help me overcome these sins?*
- ❖ *What do I need from Christ if I am to realize these truths in my life?*

SPEAKING TO GOD

After listening and hearing from God, we turn and speak to him. Prayer that follows meditation is almost always more engaged and lively!

Begin with praying through your meditative thoughts. Do not concern yourself with order or tidiness. Adore God for who he is, give thanks to him, confess sins, delight in his grace and forgiveness, or bring your requests straight to him. Visualize what it would look like if these truths were alive in your life, in our church, in our city, and in the world. Pray for God's kingdom to come in all these spheres.

THE PRESENCE OF GOD

The goal of approaching God in this way is to be lost in his presence. But, as Luther says, his presence and grace may be "fleeting or prolonged, subtle or pronounced." At times, his presence may seem tangible. It can be indescribable, physically affecting, and result in permanent life changes. Or, it can be more ordinary. Whatever the day may bring, our prayer is that you know Jesus as you draw near to him during this Lenten season.