

Lectio Divina

DAILY SCRIPTURE READING + MEDITATION + PRAYER + CONTEMPLATION

"As Lent is the time for greater love, listen to Jesus' thirst... 'Repent and believe' Jesus tells us. What are we to repent? Our indifference, our hardness of heart. What are we to believe? Jesus thirsts even now, in your heart and in the poor — He knows your weakness. He wants only your love, wants only the chance to love you."

~SAINT TERESA OF CALCUTTA (MOTHER TERESA)

Monday, March 4 ~ Eighth Week in Ordinary Time
Saint Casimir of Poland, "the peace maker"

Holy Gospel: Mark 10:17-27 As Jesus was setting out on a journey, a man ran up, knelt down before him, and asked him, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus answered him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: You shall not kill; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; you shall not defraud; honor your father and your mother." He replied and said to him, "Teacher, all of these I have observed from my youth." Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said to him, "You are lacking in one thing. Go, sell what you have, and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." At that statement, his face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions. Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the Kingdom of God!" The disciples were amazed at his words. So Jesus again said to them in reply, "Children, how hard it is to enter the Kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for one who is rich to enter the Kingdom of God." They were exceedingly astonished and said among themselves, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "For men it is impossible, but not for God. All things are possible for God."

Meditation: When Jesus challenged the man to make God his one true possession and treasure, he became dismayed. Why did he go away with sadness rather than with joy? His treasure and his hope for happiness were misplaced. He sought happiness and security in what he possessed rather than in who he could love and serve and give himself in undivided devotion. Why should Jesus call his disciples to "sell all" for the treasure of his kingdom? Treasure has a special connection to the heart, the place of desire and longing, the place of will and focus. The thing we most set our heart on is our highest treasure. The Lord himself is the greatest treasure we can have. Focusing on the treasures to be gained from God and not on the things of this earth is our greatest joy. Selling all that we have could mean many different things--letting go of attachments, friendships, influences, jobs, entertainments, styles of life--really anything that might stand in the way of our loving and following God first and foremost in our lives.

Prayer: Almighty God, to serve you is to reign; grant that, with the help of Saint Casimir's intercession, we may constantly serve you in holiness and justice. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: What earthly treasures do I possess that capture my heart, my time, my attention, my resources, potentially my life? Do these prevent me from loving God as fully as I can? If so, what treasures must I "sell" – give up – in order that I may devote my attention and my love to God, who makes all things possible?

Tuesday, March 5 ~ Eighth Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Mark 10:28-31 Peter began to say to Jesus, "We have given up everything and followed you." Jesus said, "Amen, I say to you, there is no one who has given up house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands for my sake and for the sake of the Gospel who will not receive a hundred times more now in this present age: houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and eternal life in the age to come. But many that are first will be last, and the last will be first."

Meditation: What's the best investment you can make with your life? The gospel presents us with a paradox: we lose what we keep, and we gain what we give away. When we lose our lives for Jesus Christ, we gain a priceless treasure and an inheritance which last forever. Whatever we give to God comes back a hundredfold. Generosity flows from a heart full of gratitude for the abundant mercy and grace which God grants. Do you give freely and generously? Do you support the mission of your parish church? And why do you give, for reward or for love?

Prayer: Turn our hearts to you, eternal Father, and grant that, seeking always the one thing necessary and carrying out works of charity, we may be dedicated to your worship. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: We should not be surprised if we lose favor or experience ridicule, intimidation, and injury when we take a stand on the side of truth, recognizing there are moral absolutes. In place of material wealth, Jesus promised his disciples the blessing and joy of rich fellowship with the community of believers. The Lord wants to fill our hearts with the vision of heaven and with his joy and peace. Do you know the joy of following the Lord as his disciple? Do you pray that the Holy Spirit will fill you with the joy of the Gospel and the knowledge of God's personal love?

Wednesday, March 6 ~ The Beginning of Lent Ash Wednesday

Holy Gospel: Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18 Jesus said to his disciples: "Take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them; otherwise, you will have no recompense from your heavenly Father. When you give alms, do not blow a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets to win the praise of others. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing, so that your almsgiving may be secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you. "When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners so that others may see them. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you. "When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites. They neglect their appearance, so that they may appear to others to be fasting. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to be fasting, except to your Father who is hidden. And your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you."

Meditation: As we begin this penitential season of Lent, we would do well to meditate as to why Jesus singled out prayer, fasting, and almsgiving for his disciples. The Jews



considered these three as the cardinal works of the religious life. These were seen as the key signs of a pious person, the three great pillars on which the good life was based. Jesus pointed to the heart of the matter. Why do you pray, fast, and give alms? To draw attention to yourself so that others may notice and think highly of you? Or to give glory to God? The Lord warns his disciples of self-seeking glory – the preoccupation with looking good and seeking praise from others. True piety is something more than feeling good or looking holy. True piety is loving devotion to God. It is an attitude of awe, reverence, worship and obedience. It is a gift and working of the Holy Spirit that enables us to devote our lives to God with a holy desire to please him in all things (Isaiah 11:1-2). The forty days of Lent is the annual retreat of the people of God in imitation of Jesus' forty days in the wilderness. Forty is a significant number in the scriptures. Moses went to the mountain to seek the face of God for forty days in prayer and fasting. The people of Israel were in the wilderness for forty years in preparation for their entry into the promised land. Elijah fasted for forty days as he journeyed in the wilderness to the mountain of God. We are called to journey with the Lord in a special season of prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and penitence as we prepare to celebrate the feast of Easter, the Christian Passover. The Lord gives us spiritual food and supernatural strength to seek his face and to prepare ourselves for spiritual combat and testing. We, too, must follow in the way of the cross in order to share in the victory of Christ's death and resurrection. As we begin this holy season of testing and preparation, let's ask the Lord for a fresh outpouring of his Holy Spirit that we may grow in faith, hope, and love and embrace his will more fully in our lives.

Prayer: Grant, O Lord, that we may begin with holy fasting this campaign of Christian service, so that, as we take up battle against spiritual evils, we may be armed with weapons of self-restraint. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: Do you hunger for God? Do you thirst for God's holiness? God wants to set our hearts ablaze with the fire of his Holy Spirit that we may share in his holiness and radiate the joy of the gospel to those around us. St. Augustine tells us that there are two kinds of people and two kinds of love: "One is holy, the other is selfish. One is subject to God; the other endeavors to equal Him." We are what we love. God wants to free our hearts from all that would keep us captive to selfishness and sin. "Rend your hearts and not your garments" says the prophet Joel (Joel 2:12). Use this Season of Lent to the fullest – embrace the laws of God and the teachings of Jesus Christ and His Holy Catholic Church. Undergo a conversion of mind and heart. Conform your will to God. With the help of the Holy Spirit, transform your minds and hearts to be lead in God's way of truth and holiness – the one and only way!

Thursday, March 7 ~ The Day After Ash Wednesday Saints Perpetua and Felicity, Martyrs

Holy Gospel: Luke 9:22-25 Jesus said to his disciples: "The Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised." Then he said to all, "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. What profit is there for one to gain the whole world yet lose or forfeit himself?"

Meditation: Quite simply, the cross of Jesus Christ leads to freedom and victory over sin and death. We then need to ask ourselves: "What is the cross which Christ commands me to take up each day as his disciple?" When my will crosses with his will, then his will must be done. The way of the cross involves sacrifice, the sacrifice of laying down my life each and every day for Jesus' sake. What makes such sacrifice possible and "sweet" is the love of God poured out for us in the blood of Jesus Christ. Paul the Apostle reminds us that "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit" (Romans 5:5). Try as we may, we can never out give God. He always gives us more than we can expect or imagine. Are you ready to lose all for Christ in order to gain all with Christ?

Prayer: O God, at the urging of whose love the Martyrs Saints Perpetua and Felicity defied their persecutors and overcame the torment of earth, grant, we ask, by their prayers, that we may ever grow in your love. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: We need to ask ourselves: "What will I give to God in exchange for freedom and eternal life?" In thinking about this question, are you ready to part with anything that might keep you from following him and his perfect plan for your life? Jesus poses these questions to challenge our assumptions about what is most profitable and worthwhile in life. In every decision of life we are making ourselves a certain kind of person. It is possible that some can gain all the things they set their heart on, only to wake up suddenly and discover that they missed the most important things of all. A true disciple is ready to give up all that he or she has in exchange for happiness and life with God. The life which God offers is abundant, everlasting life. And the joy which God places in our hearts no sadness or loss can diminish.

Friday, March 8 ~ The Friday After Ash Wednesday Saint John of God, Religious

Holy Gospel: Mark 9:14-15 The disciples of John approached Jesus and said, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast much, but your disciples do not fast?" Jesus answered them, "Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast."

Meditation: What kind of fasting is pleasing to God? Fasting can be done for a variety of reasons: – to gain freedom from some bad habit, addiction, or vice, to share in the suffering of those who go without, or to grow in our hunger for God and for the things of heaven. Basil the Great wrote: "Take heed that you do not make fasting to consists only in abstinence from meats. True fasting is to refrain from vice. Shred to pieces all your unjust contracts. Pardon your neighbors. Forgive them their trespasses." Do you hunger for more of God and for his holiness and for the abundant life he has to offer you?

Prayer: O God, who filled Saint John of God with a spirit of compassion, grant, we pray, that, giving ourselves to works of charity, we may merit to be found among the elect in your Kingdom. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: Do you ever find yourself hungering for God? We must remember that hungering for God and fasting for his kingdom go hand in hand. When asked why he and his disciples did not fast Jesus used the vivid picture of a wedding celebration. In Jesus' time the newly wed celebrated their honeymoon at home for a whole week with all the guests! This was a time of great feasting and celebrating. Jesus points to himself as the bridegroom and his disciples as the bridegroom's friends. He alludes to the fact that God takes delight in his people as a groom delights in his bride (Isaiah 62:5). To be in God's presence is pure delight and happiness. But Jesus also reminds his followers that there is a time for fasting and for humbling oneself in preparation for the coming of God's kingdom and for the return of the Messianic King. The Lord's disciples must also bear the cross of affliction and purification. For the disciple there is both a time for rejoicing in the Lord's presence and celebrating his goodness and a time for seeking the Lord with humility, fasting, and mourning for sin. If we hunger for the Lord, he will not disappoint us. His grace draws us to his throne of mercy and favor. Do you seek the Lord with confident trust and allow his Holy Spirit to transform your life with his power and grace?

Scripture passages (NAB translation) courtesy of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. Daily meditations and contemplations adapted from the Irish Jesuits' *Sacred Space* web page and *Biblical Medications for Lent* by Rev. Carroll Stuhlmueller, C.P.; prayers are from *The Roman Missal*, Catholic Book Publishing, 2011; information about saints, solemnities, feasts and memorials courtesy of the Catholic Culture web site.

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A LENTEN REFLECTION AT THE BEGINNING OF LENT

Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned. ~Psalm 51

Mercy. That's what it's all about. As we begin Lent, a great place to start is with a better understanding of mercy.

Often when we think about Lent, we think of it with a sort of dread. "I have to give something up," we often think. But if that is our thought then we are missing the point. Do I "have to" give something up? Well, yes and no. It's true that God wills this and has spoken this practice of self-denial and self-discipline to us through His Church. That is true. But it's much more of an invitation to grace than the imposition of a burden.

Giving something up is really all about entering into God's abundant mercy on a deeper level. It's about being freed from all that binds us and it helps us experience the new life we so deeply seek.

Giving something up could refer to something as simple as fasting from a food or drink. Or, it can be any intentional act that requires a certain self-denial. But this is good! Why? Because it strengthens us in our spirit and our will. It strengthens us to be more resolved to say yes to God on that complete level.

So often in life we are controlled by our emotions and desires. We have an impulse for this or that or to do this or that and we often let those impulses or desires control us. Entering into a practice of self-denial helps strengthen us to control our disordered tendencies rather than being controlled by them. And this applies to much more than just food and drink. It applies to many things in life including our life of virtue, especially our charity.

Mercy is all about charity. It's about love in the way God wants us to love. It's about being free to let love consume us and take us over so that, in the end, all we want to do is love. This can be a hard practice to establish in our lives but is the source of our joy and fulfillment.

Mercy, in particular, is an act of love that, in a sense, is not deserved by another. It's a free gift that is given purely from the motivation of love. And this is exactly the love God gives us. God's love is all mercy. And if we want to receive that mercy then we also have to give it. And if we want to give it we need to properly dispose ourselves to giving mercy. This is accomplished, in part, by our little acts of self-denial.

So make this a great Lent, but don't get stuck thinking that the Lenten sacrifices are burdensome. They are one essential piece of the pathway to the life God wants to bestow upon us.

THIS REFLECTION IS MADE AVAILABLE COURTESY OF MY CATHOLIC LIFE.