

# TIMELY TOPICS

OFFICE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND CATECHESIS

## Ash Wednesday Wake-Up Call

Sometimes when we have grown complacent about a particular situation in our lives, it takes some bone-jarring, teeth-rattling sort of event to call us back to attention.

We receive a **wake-up call**.

In the first reading for **Ash Wednesday** we hear such a wake-up call, not only for the ancient Israelites but also for all of us today.

This is no polite whispering, “If you maybe would like to . . .” Rather it is a powerful summons, a “blast of the ram’s horn,” to be ignored at one’s own peril. We as a community are commanded to

- ☞ **Sound the alarm:** We realize that we are wandering from God’s path, we are not so faithful.
- ☞ **Tear our hearts:** We stop. We open our hearts to God’s word and to God’s working in our lives.
- ☞ **Come back to God:** We listen to God calling. And we do not avoid the call. We turn back.

The palms waved in joyful acclaim from the last Palm Sunday have been reduced to ashes; now we use the ashes to remind us that we begin again to prepare for the Easter fire.

The whole point is not so much what we do for God, but what we let God do in us. We allow God to work in us when we **make room for God** in our hearts and lives. And how do we make room?

- ☞ **Fasting:** I look at what fills up my life, e.g., the internet, television, shopping, sleeping in, and gossiping. What could I remove, what could I fast from, that would make time for God?

**Blow the ram’s horn in Zion!  
Sound the alarm on my holy mountain . . .  
Come back to me with all your heart, fasting, weeping, mourning.  
Tear your hearts and not your clothes, and come back to the Lord  
your God,  
who is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, rich in faithful  
love . . .**

**Blow the ram’s horn in Zion!  
Order a fast, proclaim a solemn assembly,  
call the people together, summon the community.**

*Joel 2: 1, 12-13, 15-16*

- ☞ **Almsgiving:** I look at the many blessings in my life, e.g., health, family, food and shelter, time and energy. What of my blessings could I share with someone else? We are *all* God’s people.
- ☞ **Prayer:** I look at God, always there waiting for me, inviting me. How can I use my time and energy to make myself more available to God? How do I let God change, and heal, my heart?

For the Israelites, the holiest, most solemn gatherings were announced with the blast of the *shofar*, the ram’s horn. Even today, *Rosh Hoshana* (the New Year) and *Yom Kippur* (the Day of Atonement) traditionally open with the sounding of the *shofar*. The people are brought to attention, that they might realize the presence of the Lord God in their midst and be prepared to “come back” to the One who is “gracious, and compassionate, slow to anger, rich in faithful love.”

Ash Wednesday comes with just such a wake-up call.

**What do I want to “wake up to” during Lent this year?**

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## The “Three Pillars” Draw us to the Baptismal and Penitential Spirit of Lent

- ☞ The season we now know as Lent grew out of the period, in the early church, of preparation/ purification for those “catechumens” preparing for baptism at Easter. The entire community joined with them in their preparation.
- ☞ It also was shaped by the old “Order of Penitents,” in which those who had committed serious sin began a time of public penance in preparation for being received back into the Church at the Easter rites.
- ☞ Eventually, the penitential aspect overtook the baptismal focus, and Lent became primarily a time of “gloom-and-doom,” focused almost exclusively on personal acts of sacrifice.
- ☞ Since Vatican II and the restoration of the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults, we have regained the baptismal focus of the Lenten season.
- ☞ This includes those of us who are already baptized, as we, too, undergo a time of preparation and “turning back to God” in order to renew our own baptismal promises at the Easter Vigil.

## Correlation to Certification Standards & the Graded Course of Study

In the past we provided correlations of the information covered in Timely Topics to the RGCS. We will resume this along with a correlation with the National Certification Standards, in the hope that this will help leaders to see the formational function of this material.

### **National Certification Standards for Lay Ecclesial Ministers**

*The above material and the ideas/in-service in LINK A meet Core Competencies as described in*

#### **Standard One:**

- 1.9 PCL: Recognize God’s activity in personal life experiences and articulate this understanding with others.

#### **Standard Two:**

- 2.6 PCL: Engage in ongoing professional education and formation.

#### **Standard Three:**

- 3.14 PCL: Explain the church’s historical development and its relevance to the modern church.
- 3.16 PCL: Promote the ecclesiological renewal confirmed by Vatican II.
- 3.20 PCL: Identify elements of our Catholic faith that are rooted in Jewish traditions.

#### **Standard Four:**

- 4.7 PCL: Guide and assist the catechists in parish catechetical ministry.
- 4.14 PCL: Utilize a variety of prayer experiences in catechetical sessions.
- 4.15 PCL: Serve as a resource regarding the catechetical dimension of initiation into the church.

#### **Standard Five:**

- 5.13 PCL: Provide orientation and in-servicing of catechetical committee members and formation teams in their areas of responsibility.

### **Religion Graded Course of Study**

**Standard I-A:** Identify Sacred Scripture as the Word of God and a book of faith.

**Standard 2-A:** Describe God as personally involved in the history of God’s people.

**Standard 3-A, 3-B-1:** Identify prayer as being open actively to God through all forms of communication; Create ways that sacred art/music can help one pray.

**Standard 4-D:** Discipleship as living out one’s baptismal call.

## “Come back to me” In Service for Lent

**Play** some reflective music as they gather to help attendees settle in. **Suggestion:** “Hosea” or “Come Back To Me” found on *Listen* by the Monks of Weston Priory [www.westonpriory.org/music](http://www.westonpriory.org/music)

**Call them to attention** with three sharp strikes on something percussive, *e.g.*, a chime or bell; a spoon against a water-glass; a metal spoon against the bottom of a saucepan, *etc.* (count five seconds between each of the three rings).

**Read aloud** as a proclamation, the passage from Joel 2 that appears on the front page, Joel 2: 1, 12-13, 15-16

**Ask them to think** for a minute about what words may have struck them in the reading; then, invite anyone who wants to, to say aloud the words that impressed them—no discussions/commentaries – just say the word[s].

**Input** Use material from *Timely Topics*, to the extent you feel is appropriate.

**Pose the question** How can I ‘come back to God’ during this Lenten season?

**Ask participants to think** about this personally, and how they might use it with their learners

**Exchange ideas** for a brief time

**Conclude** with the “Our Father,” prayed together slowly and thoughtfully.

## Ideas for every age

- ⌘ **Prayer/journaling time:** use above In-Service with adults (*e.g.*, RCIA) or teens, as a (substitute “families, children or classroom” for “learners” in the fourth point above)
- ⌘ **Present the “Three Pillars of Lent”** to elementary school through adult learners.  
**Ask what these can mean to them.** Try to move discussion away from simple answers like “I will give up candy” to thoughtful responses such as “I will be less selfish and clean my room without being told” or “I will spend less time on video games and spend more time with [family, friend, neighbor].”
- ⌘ **What service project** to the parish, school, or neighborhood could the class or group undertake as a way of “opening our hearts to God as we open them to other people”?
- ⌘ **Explore the history of the development of Lent** as a liturgical season.
  - ~ Research the “Catechumenate” and the “Order of Penitents” in the early church; how and why did these change?
  - ~ What is the restored Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults?
  - ~ How is the “baptismal catechumenate” a model for the way we celebrate Lent today?
- ⌘ **Look at the mass readings** each week of Lent, especially the gospel for the coming Sunday. Think/discuss/pray about what God is saying to us, today (use art-work, mime, music, video, *etc.* to provide a variety of modes of expression).
- ⌘ **Listen to/ learn the song, “Hosea”** (*see In-Service, above*); explore its meaning. How can we “come back to God with all [our] heart” during Lent?

## Resources

### CATHOLIC UPDATES *from St Anthony Messenger Press, Cincinnati, OH*

Lenten Customs: Baptism Is the Key	March 2002	#C0302
Lent: A Journey into the Inner Self	February 1991	#C0291
Ash Wednesday: Our Shifting Understanding of Lent	February 2004	#C0204

### DVDs

1009	The Catechumenate in Brief	USCCB	(teens, adults)
1100	Celebrating the Seasons of Advent and Lent	Franciscan Communications	(gr. 3-8)

### VIDEOS

VTE 1491	The Catechumenate in Brief	Harcourt Publishing	(adults)
VTE 1655	Lent: A Time of Renewal	Franciscan Communications	(family/adults)
VTE 1656	Lent: A Time to Forgive	23 <sup>rd</sup> Publications	(family/parents)

### BOOKS

- Behe, Mary and Margaret Savitskas. [Totally Lent! A Kid's Journey to Easter 2009](#)
- Binz, Stephen J. [Conversing with God in Lent](#). Ijamsville, MD: The Word Among Us Press, 2010
- Boyer, Mark. [Lent and Easter: Prayer At Home](#). Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2002  
*Annual series, **Totally Lent!** from Pflaum Publishing, Dayton, OH:*
- Broslavick, Chris and Tony Pichler. [Totally Lent! A Teen's Journey to Easter](#). 2009 (also could be adapted for use with RCIA, adult faith formation)
- Dues, Greg. [Catholic Customs and Traditions](#). Mystic, CT" 23<sup>rd</sup> Publications, 2000
- Drumm, Michael and Tom Gunning. [A Sacramental People: Initiation into A Faith Community](#). Mystic, CT: 23<sup>rd</sup> Publications, 2000
- Glavich, Mary Kathleen, SND. [A Pictionary of Lent: Facts and Activities from A to Z for Grades 3 to 6](#). E. T. Nedder Publishing, 2005 (with reproducible masters)
- Marriage and Family Life Office, Diocese of Columbus. [Lenten and Easter Traditions: Keeping the Seasons Holy](#). Columbus, OH. 2009 call 614-241-2560 for copies
- Savitskas, Margaret. [Totally Lent! A Child's Journey to Easter](#). 2009
- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#). New York, NY: Image Doubleday Books, 1995
- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. [The Rites of the Catholic Church](#). Washington, DC: USCCB
- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. [United States Catholic Catechism for Adults](#). Washington, DC: USCCB Publishing, 2006

### CHILDREN'S STORIES

Hazen, Barbara Shook. <u><a href="#">Even If I Did Something Awful</a></u>	Trent, John. <u><a href="#">The Black and White Rainbow</a></u>
Henkes, Kevin. <u><a href="#">Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse</a></u>	Van Leeuwen, Jan. <u><a href="#">Sorry</a></u>
Joose, Barbara. <u><a href="#">Mama, Do You Love Me?</a></u>	Wilde, Oscar. <u><a href="#">The Selfish Giant</a></u>