

CONVERSION TO CHRIST

A LENTEN JOURNEY WITH
POPE FRANCIS
ST. MOTHER TERESA
FR. HENRI NOUWEN

INTRODUCTION

Each year during Lent we are invited to deepen our commitment to Christ and to his community the Church. Through our various disciplines of scripture reading, prayer, fasting, almsgiving and service to the poor and others in need, we deepen our discipleship—following Jesus more closely and continuing his mission to build God’s kingdom now in ourselves, our families and our communities to make it flourish anew. On this year’s Lenten journey of conversion, we will be guided by three practical and helpful spiritual guides: Pope Francis, Missionaries of Charity founder St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta (1910-1997) and priest-psychologist Fr. Henri J.M. Nouwen (1932-1996). Through their insightful daily reflections we will be led ever deeper into the mystery of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. For as Pope Francis reminds us, our goal is to “feel the closeness of the kingdom of God, of that state of eternal life towards which we are journeying. This thought gives us hope: we are walking toward the resurrection. To see Jesus, to encounter Jesus: this is our joy! We will all be together joyfully with Jesus. This is our destiny!”

—Steve Mueller, *Editor*

ASH WEDNESDAY

LET US BEGIN OUR LENTEN JOURNEY

“Rend your hearts and not your garments.” (Joel 2:13)

With its invitations to conversion, Lent comes providentially to awaken us, to rouse us from torpor, from the risk of moving forward by inertia. The exhortation which the Lord addresses to us through the prophet Joel is strong and clear: “Return to me with all your heart” (Joel 2:12). Why must we return to God? Because something is not right in us, not right in society, not right in the Church and we need to change and give it a new direction. And this is called needing to convert! Once again Lent comes to make its prophetic appeal, to remind us that it is possible to create something new within ourselves and around us, simply because God is faithful, always faithful, for he cannot deny himself, he continues to be rich in goodness and mercy, and he is always ready to forgive and start afresh. With this filial confidence, let us set out on the journey!

—Pope Francis

Jesus, today I will begin my Lenten journey to you by deciding to change...

THURSDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY

RESTING IN GOD’S LOVE

“Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” (Matthew 11:29)

One thing Jesus asks of me: that I lean on him; that in him and only in him I put complete trust; that I surrender myself to him unreservedly. Even when all goes wrong and I feel as if I am a ship without a compass, I must give myself completely to him. I must not attempt to control God’s action; I must not count the stages in the journey he would have me make. I must not desire a clear perception of my advance upon the road, must not know precisely where I am upon the way of holiness. I ask God to make a saint of me; yet I must leave to him the choice of the saintliness itself and still more the means which leads to it.

—St. Mother Teresa

O God, I desire to give myself entirely to you.

FRIDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY

BE WITH ME ALWAYS

“Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

(Matthew 28:20)

Jesus, Lent is a time to be with you in a special way, a time to pray, to fast and thus to follow you on your way to Jerusalem, to Golgotha and to the final victory over death. I am still so divided. I truly want to follow you, but I also want to follow my own desires and lend an ear to the voices that speak about prestige, success, human respect, pleasure, power and influence. Help me to become deaf to these voices and more attentive to your voice, which calls me to choose the narrow road to life. I know that Lent is going to be a very hard time for me. The choice for your way has to be made every moment of my life. I have to choose thoughts that are your thoughts, words that are your words, and actions that are your actions. Please be with me at every moment and in every place. Give me the strength and the courage to live this season faithfully, so that, when Easter comes, I will be able to taste with joy the new life which you have prepared for me.

—Henri J.M. Nouwen

Jesus, help me spend more time with you each day.

SATURDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY

THE CHALLENGE OF CONVERSION

“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; be converted and believe in the good news.” (Mark 1:15)

Conversion of heart is the chief characteristic of this Lenten season of grace. This challenges all of us without exception, and it reminds us that conversion is not to be reduced to outward forms or to vague intentions, but engages and transforms one's entire existence beginning from the center of the person, from the conscience. We are invited to embark upon a journey on which, by defying routine, we strive to open our eyes and ears, but especially to open our hearts, in

order to go beyond our own “backyard.” We risk closing ourselves off to others and forgetting them. But only when the difficulties and suffering of others confront and question us may we begin our journey of conversion towards Easter. It is an itinerary which involves the cross and self-denial.

—Pope Francis

Jesus, help me open my heart more fully to you.

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

THE REAL RENEWAL

*“My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.”
(2 Corinthians 12:9)*

The church of God needs saints today. This imposes a great responsibility to fight against our own ego and love of comfort that leads us to choose a comfortable and insignificant mediocrity.

The church wants renewal, but that does not mean changing a habit and a few prayers. Renewal is faithfulness to a spirit which seeks holiness by means of a poor and humble life, the exercise of sincere and patient charity, spontaneous sacrifice and generosity of heart. We should always ask Jesus, “Make me a saint according to your own heart, meek and humble.” Never stoop lower than the ideal. Let nothing satisfy you but God. Let us thank God for showering love on us, in so many ways and in so many places. Let us in return, as an act of gratitude and adoration, determine to be holy because God is holy.

—St. Mother Teresa

Jesus, help me move forward just a little more toward a holy life.

MONDAY, WEEK 1

JUST TURN AROUND!

*“Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth!
For I am God, and there is no other.” (Isaiah 45:22)*

Once I saw a mime straining as if to open one of the three doors in a room where he found himself. He pushed and pulled at the door-knobs, but none of the doors would open. Then he kicked with his feet against the panels of the door, but they didn't break. Finally, he

threw his full weight against the doors, but none of them yielded. The man was so concentrated on the three locked doors that he didn't even notice that the room had no back wall and that he could simply walk out if he would only turn around and look! That is what conversion is all about. It is a complete turnaround that allows us to discover that we are not the prisoners we think we are. From God's place, we often look like the man who tries to open the locked doors of his room. We worry about many things and even wound ourselves while worrying. God says: "Turn around, set your heart on my kingdom. I give you all the freedom you desire."

—Henri J.M. Nouwen

Jesus, help me turn myself and my life more toward you.

TUESDAY, WEEK 1

A TIME FOR PRAYER

"Whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you." (Matthew 6:6)

The first element in our Lenten spiritual journey is prayer. Prayer is the strength of the Christian and of every person who believes. In the weakness and frailty of our lives, we can turn to God with the confidence of children and enter into communion with him. In the face of so many wounds that hurt us and could harden our hearts, we are called to dive into the sea of prayer, which is the sea of God's boundless love, to taste his tenderness. Lent is a time of prayer, of more intense prayer, more prolonged, more assiduous, more able to take on the needs of the brethren; intercessory prayer, to intercede before God for the many situations of poverty and suffering.

—Pope Francis

Jesus, help me commit myself to more daily prayer with you.



WEDNESDAY, WEEK 1

WAITING IN SILENCE

“For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from him.”

(Psalm 62:5)

If we really want to pray we must first learn to listen, for in the silence of the heart God speaks. And to be able to see that silence, to be able to hear God, we need a clean heart, for a clean heart can see God, can hear God, can listen to God. When it is difficult to pray, we must help ourselves to do so. The first means we must use to help ourselves is silence, for souls of prayer and souls of great silence. We cannot put ourselves directly in the presence of God if we do not practice internal and external silence. God is a friend of silence. Let us adore Jesus in our hearts, who spent thirty years out of thirty-three in silence, who began his public life by spending forty days in silence, who often retired alone to spend the night on a mountain in silence. Let us adore Jesus in the eucharistic silence.

—St. Mother Teresa

Jesus, help me to spend more time listening quietly in my prayer.

THURSDAY, WEEK 1

CHANGING OUR HEARTS

“Be compassionate, just as your Father is compassionate.” (Luke 6:36)

To make compassion the bottom line of life, to be open and vulnerable to others, to make community life the focus, and to let prayer be the breath of your life that requires a willingness to tear down the countless walls that we have erected between ourselves and others in order to maintain our safe isolation. This is a lifelong and arduous spiritual battle because while tearing down walls with one hand, we build new ones with the other. After I had left the university and chosen a life in community, I realized that, even in community, there are numerous ways to play the controlling games of individualism. Indeed, true conversion asks for a lot more than a change of place. It asks for a change of heart.

—Henri J.M. Nouwen

Jesus, help me to show more compassion for those around me.

FRIDAY, WEEK 1

TUNING OUR HEARTS TO ESSENTIALS

“Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?” (Isaiah 58:6)

The second key element of the Lenten journey is fasting. We must be careful not to practice a formal fast, or one which in truth “satisfies” us because it makes us feel good about ourselves. Fasting makes sense if it questions our security, and if it also leads to some benefit for others, if it helps us to cultivate the style of the Good Samaritan, who bends down to his brother in need and takes care of him. Fasting involves choosing a sober lifestyle; a way of life that does not waste, a way of life that does not “throw away.” Fasting helps us to attune our hearts to the essential and to sharing. It is a sign of awareness and responsibility in the face of injustice, abuse, especially to the poor and the little ones, and it is a sign of the trust we place in God and in his providence.

—Pope Francis

Jesus, help me connect my fasting to a more Christlike lifestyle.

SATURDAY, WEEK 1

POVERTY OF HEART

“Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?”

(Matthew 25:44)

There are different kinds of poverty. Some people live and die in hunger. But there is another worse poverty, spiritual poverty. People do not believe in God, do not pray. People do not care for each other. You have the poverty of people who are dissatisfied with what they have, who do not know how to suffer, who give in to despair. This poverty of heart is often more difficult to relieve and to defeat. Once in a while we should ask ourselves several questions to guide our actions like: Do I know the poor? Do I know the poor in my family, those who are closest to me—people who are poor, but not because



they lack bread? There are other types of poverty just as painful because they are more intrinsic. Perhaps what my husband or wife lacks, what my children lack, what my parents lack, is not clothes or food. Perhaps they lack love, because I do not give it to them!

—St. Mother Teresa

Jesus, help me extend my loving care to those in need around me.

2ND SUNDAY OF LENT

TRUSTING THE INNER VOICE

“Let me see your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely.” (Song of Songs 2:14)

Do you really want to be converted? Are you willing to be transformed? Or do you keep clutching your old ways of life with one hand while with the other you beg people to help you change? Conversion is certainly not something you can bring about yourself. It is not a question of willpower. You have to trust the inner voice that shows the way. You know that inner voice. You turn to it often. But after you have heard with clarity what you are asked to do, you start raising questions, fabricating objections and seeking everyone else’s opinion. Thus you become entangled in countless often contradictory thoughts, feelings and ideas and lose touch with the God in you. And you end up dependent on all the people you have gathered around you. Only by attending constantly to the inner voice can you be converted to a new life of freedom and joy.

—Henri J.M. Nouwen

Jesus, help me be more open to the transformations now happening in me.

MONDAY, WEEK 2

GIVING GENEROUSLY

“When you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” (Matthew 6:3-4)

The third element of the Lenten journey is almsgiving: it points to giving freely, for in almsgiving one gives something to someone

from whom one does not expect to receive anything in return. Gratuitousness should be one of the characteristics of the Christian, who aware of having received everything from God gratuitously, that is, without any merit of his own, learns to give to others freely. Today gratuitousness is often not part of daily life where everything is bought and sold. Everything is calculated and measured. Almsgiving helps us to experience giving freely, which leads to freedom from the obsession of possessing, from the fear of losing what we have, from the sadness of one who does not wish to share his wealth with others.

—Pope Francis

Jesus, help me give more freely and generously to those in need.

TUESDAY, WEEK 2

IT'S ON US

“Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.” (Luke 6:38)

If sometimes our poor people have had to die of starvation it is not because God didn't care for them, but because you and I didn't give, were not instruments of love in the hands of God, to give them that bread, to give them that clothing; because we did not recognize him, when once more Christ came in distressing disguise—in the hungry man, in the lonely man, in the homeless child, and seeking for shelter. God has identified himself with the hungry, the sick, the naked, the homeless; hunger, not only for bread, but for love, for care, to be somebody to someone; nakedness, not of clothing only, but nakedness of that compassion that very few people give to the unknown; homelessness, not only just for a shelter made of stone, but that homelessness that comes from having no one to call your own.

—St. Mother Teresa

Jesus, help me discover who most needs my help and care.



WEDNESDAY, WEEK 2

NOTICING GOD'S PRESENCE

"Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known." (Jeremiah 33:3)

Every encounter in life involves the spiritual discipline of seeing God in others and making known to others what we have seen. Since our seeing is only partial, we also need other people who will help us to see. Through each encounter, we will come to see more clearly. Everyone is a different refraction of the same love of God, the same light of the world, coming to us. We need a contemplative discipline for seeing this light. If I have discovered God as the center of my being, then the God in me recognizes God in the world. We also then recognize the demons at work in us and the world. The demons are always close, trying to conquer us. The spiritual life requires a constant and vigilant deepening and enlivening of the presence of God in our hearts.



—Henri J.M. Nouwen

Jesus, help me be more attentive to God's hidden presence in others.

THURSDAY, WEEK 2

TURNING FROM SINFUL WAYS

"Draw near to God, and God will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded."

(James 4:8)

During Lent, the Church renews her appeal to repentance, the call to change one's life. Conversion is not the question of a moment or a time of the year, it is an undertaking that lasts one's entire lifetime. Who among us can presume not to be a sinner? No one. We are all sinners. But we are called to abandon the behavior of sin and fix our gaze on what is essential. This is the difference between life deformed by sin and life illumined by grace. From the heart of the person renewed in the likeness of God comes good behavior: to speak the truth always and avoid all deceit; not to steal, but rather to share all you have with others, especially those in need; not to give in to anger, resentment

and revenge, but to be meek, magnanimous and ready to forgive; not to gossip which ruins the good name of people, but to look more at the good side of everyone.

—Pope Francis

Jesus, help me continue to change my life with your help.

FRIDAY, WEEK 2

LIVING GOD'S LOVE

"How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?

How long will you hide your face from me?" (Psalm 13:1)

We have the specific task of giving material and spiritual help to the poorest of the poor, not only the ones in the slums but those who live in any corner of the world as well. To do this, we make ourselves live the love of God in prayer and in our work, through a life characterized by the simplicity and humility of the gospel. We do this by loving Jesus in the bread of the Eucharist, and loving and serving him hidden under the painful guise of the poorest of the poor, whether their poverty is a material poverty or a spiritual one. We do this by recognizing in them (and giving back to them) the image and likeness of God.

—St. Mother Teresa

Jesus, help me to find some small way to love and serve you in others.

SATURDAY, WEEK 2

DO YOUR HIDDEN WORK

"Do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God;

I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand." (Isaiah 41:10)

O Lord, this Lent is passing quickly. I entered into it with fear, but also with great expectations. I hoped for a great breakthrough, a powerful conversion, a real change of heart. I wanted Easter to be a day so full of light that not even a trace of darkness would be left in my soul. But I know that you do not always come to your people with thunder and lightning. Let me be thankful for your gentle way. I know you are at work and will not leave me alone. I know you are

quicken me for Easter but in a way fitting to my own history and my own temperament. I pray that these last three weeks will bring me a greater desire to follow you on the way that you create for me and to accept the cross that you give to me. Be with me tomorrow and in the days to come, and let me experience your gentle presence.
—Henri J.M. Nouwen

Jesus, help me trust your gentle action within me to draw me closer to you.

3RD SUNDAY OF LENT

MARY OUR EXAMPLE

“Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” (Luke 1:38)

Let us turn in prayer to Mary, Mother of the Church and Mother of our faith. Mother, help our faith! Open our ears to hear God’s word and to recognize his voice and call. Awaken in us a desire to follow in his footsteps, to go forth from our own land and to receive his promise.

Help us to be touched by his love, that we may touch him in faith. Help us to entrust ourselves fully to him and to believe in his love, especially at times of trial, beneath the shadow of the cross, when our faith is called to mature. Sow in our faith the joy of the Risen One. Remind us that those who believe are never alone. Teach us to see all things with the eyes of Jesus, that he may be light for our path. And may this light of faith always increase in us, until the dawn of that undying day which is Christ himself, your Son, our Lord!

—Pope Francis

Jesus, help me renew my desire to follow you more closely as Mary did.

MONDAY, WEEK 3

DOING THE SMALL THINGS

“Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much.”

(Luke 16:10)

You and I have been created for greater things. We have not been created to just pass through this life without aim. And that greater aim is to love and be loved. Open your hearts to the love of God which God will give you. God loves you with tenderness and will give you

gifts not to keep but to share. We often feel that what we are doing is just a drop in the ocean. But if that drop was not there, I think the ocean would be less by that missing drop. We don't have to think in numbers. We can only love one person at a time, serve one person at a time. We all have much to give, to share, to contribute wherever we find ourselves to be living. Very humble work, that is where you and I must be. For there are many people who can do big things. But there are few people who will do the small things.

—St. Mother Teresa

Jesus, help me focus on helping just one person at a time.

TUESDAY, WEEK 3

GOD MUST BE MY CENTER

“We love because God first loved us. Those who say, ‘I love God,’ and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen.” (1 John 4:19-20)

As soon as I say, “God exists,” my existence no longer can remain in the center, because the essence of the knowledge of God reveals my own existence as deriving its total being from his. That is the true conversion experience. I no longer let the knowledge of my existence be the center from which I derive, project, deduct or intuit the existence of God. I suddenly or slowly find my own existence revealed to me in and through the knowledge of God. Then it becomes real for me that I can love myself and my neighbor only because God has loved me first. The life-converting experience is not the discovery that I have choices to make that determine the way I live out my existence, but the awareness that my existence itself is not in the center. Once I “know” God, that is, once I experience God’s love as the love in which all my human experiences are anchored, I can desire only one thing: to be in that love.

—Henri J.M. Nouwen

Jesus, help me re-center my life around you and your ways.



FRIDAY, WEEK 3

BELONGING TO GOD

“If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. Because you do not belong to the world, I have chosen you out of the world.” (John 15:19)

Jesus wants to make it clear that the God whom he announces and in whose name he acts is the God of compassion, who offers himself as example and model for all human behavior. But there is more. Becoming like the heavenly Father is not just one important aspect of Jesus’ teaching, it is the very heart of his message. The radical quality of Jesus’ words and the seeming impossibility of his demands are quite obvious when heard as part of a general call to become and to be true sons and daughters of God. As long as we belong to this world, we will remain subject to its competitive ways and expect to be rewarded for all the good we do. But when we belong to God, who loves us without conditions, we can live as he does. The great conversion called for by Jesus is to move from belonging to the world to belonging to God.



—Henri J.M. Nouwen

Jesus, help me become more aware that I am truly God’s beloved child.

SATURDAY, WEEK 3

YOU ARE CHRIST’S

“Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” (Galatians 5:24)

Everything comes from God and is his gift: the world, life, death, the present, the future, but “you are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s” (1 Corinthians 3:23). Hence belonging to God comes about through a unique and personal relationship with Jesus, which baptism confers on us from the beginning of our rebirth to new life. Christ continually summons us by his word to place our trust in him. Therefore every vocation, even within the variety of paths, always requires an exodus from oneself in order to center one’s life on Christ and on his gospel. Whether in married life, religious consecration as well as in priestly

life, we must surmount the ways of thinking and acting that do not conform to the will of God. Therefore, we are all called to adore Christ in our hearts in order to allow ourselves to be touched by the impulse of grace contained in the seed of the word, which must grow in us and be transformed into concrete service to our neighbor.

—Pope Francis

Jesus, help me be more attentive to God's word in my prayer and action.

4TH SUNDAY OF LENT

LOVE IS PROVED IN DEEDS

"We have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them."

(1 John 4:16)

Love does not live on words, nor can it be explained by words—especially that love which serves God, which comes from God and which finds God and touches God. We must reach the heart, and to reach the heart as we must, love is proved in deeds. Perhaps it is only a smile, a little visit, or simply the fact of building a fire for someone, writing a letter for a blind person, bringing a few lumps of coal, finding a pair of shoes, reading for someone. This is only a little bit, yes, a very tiny bit, but it will be our love of God in action. Never think that a small action done to your neighbor is not worth much. It is not how much we do that is pleasing to God, but how much love we put into the doing. That is what the good God looks for—because God is love and God made us in the divine image to love and to be loved.

—St. Mother Teresa

Jesus, help me find some small ways to help others who are in need.

MONDAY, WEEK 4

GROPING IN THE DARK

"Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me." (Psalm 23:4)

O Lord, I feel like I am groping in the dark. I have received much from you, and still it is hard for me simply to be quiet and present in your presence. My mind is so chaotic, so full of dispersed ideas,

plans, memories and fantasies. I want to be with you and you alone, concentrate on your Word, listen to your voice and look at you as you reveal yourself to your friends. But even with the best intentions I wander off to less important things and discover that my heart is drawn to my own little worthless treasures. I cannot pray without the power from on high, the power of your Spirit. Send your Spirit, Lord, so that your Spirit can pray in me, can say “Lord Jesus,” and can call out “Abba, Father.” I am waiting, Lord, I am expecting, I am hoping. Do not leave me without your Spirit. Give me your unifying and consoling Spirit.

—Henri J.M. Nouwen

Jesus, help me to pray better with the help of your Holy Spirit.

TUESDAY, WEEK 4

SHARING GOD'S GOOD NEWS

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

Jesus wants evangelizers who proclaim the good news not only with words, but above all by a life transfigured by God's presence. It is impossible to persevere in a fervent evangelization unless we are convinced from personal experience that it is not the same thing to have known Jesus as not to have known him, to walk with him as to walk blindly, to hear his word as not to know it, and to contemplate him, worship him, find our peace in him, as not to. With Jesus life becomes richer and with him it is easier to find meaning in everything. True missionaries, who never ceases to be disciples, know that Jesus walks with them, speaks to them, breathes with them, works with them. They sense Jesus alive with them in the midst of the missionary enterprise. Unless we see him present at the heart of our missionary commitment, our enthusiasm soon wanes and we are no longer sure of what it is that we are handing on; we lack vigor and passion. A person who is not convinced, enthusiastic, certain and in love, will convince nobody.

—Pope Francis

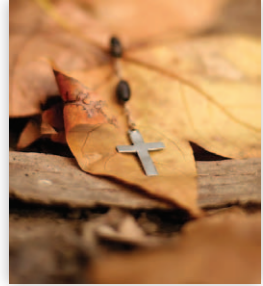
Jesus, help me discover ways to share the good news of your saving presence.

WEDNESDAY, WEEK 4

FINDING GOD EVERYWHERE

“Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth.” (Psalm 46:10)

Silence of the heart, not only of the mouth, is necessary. Then you can hear God everywhere; in the closing of the door, in the person who needs you, in the birds that sing, in the flowers, the animals—that silence which is wonder and praise. Why? Because God is everywhere, and you can see and hear him. We need to find God, and he cannot be found in noise and restlessness. In the silence of the heart, God speaks to us. We need silence to be alone with God, to speak to him, to listen to him, to ponder his words deep in our hearts. We need to be alone with God in silence to be renewed and to be transformed. Silence gives us a new outlook on life. In it we are filled with the grace of God, which makes us do all things with joy.



—St. Mother Teresa

Jesus, help me practice finding you everywhere in my life.

THURSDAY, WEEK 4

THE QUESTION WE CAN'T AVOID

“Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” (Matthew 25:40)

Our lives as we live them seem to anticipate questions that never will be asked. It seems as if we are getting ourselves ready for the question, “How much did you earn during your lifetime?” or, “How many friends did you make?” or, “How much progress did you make on your career?” or, “How much influence did you have on people?” Were any of these to be the questions Christ will ask when he comes again in glory, many of us could approach the judgment day with great confidence. But nobody is going to hear any of these questions. The question we all are going to face is the question we are least prepared for. It is the question: “What have you done for the least of mine?” It is the question of the just judge who in that question reveals to us

that making peace and working for justice can never be separated. As long as there are people who are less than we, in whatever way or form, the question of the last judgment will be with us. The question makes the coming of Christ an ever present event.

—Henri J.M. Nouwen

Jesus, help me be more attentive to the “least” persons I usually don’t notice.

FRIDAY, WEEK 4

YOU DON’T CARRY YOUR CROSS ALONE

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28)

According to an ancient Roman tradition, while fleeing the city during Nero’s persecutions, St. Peter saw Jesus travelling in the opposite direction toward the city, and asked him in amazement: “Lord, where



are you going?” Jesus’ responded: “I am going to Rome to be crucified again.” At that moment, Peter understood that he had to follow the Lord with courage, to the very end. But he also realized that he would never be alone on the journey. Jesus, who had loved him even unto death, would always be with him. Jesus,

with his cross, walks with us and takes upon himself our fears, our problems and our sufferings, even those which are deepest and most painful. With the cross, Jesus unites himself to the silence of the victims of violence, those who can no longer cry out, especially the innocent and the defenseless. The cross of Christ bears the suffering and the sin of mankind, including our own. Jesus accepts all this with open arms, bearing on his shoulders our crosses and saying to us: “Have courage! You do not carry your cross alone!”

—Pope Francis

Jesus, help me recognize when you are helping me bear my burdens.

SATURDAY, WEEK 4

THE GOOD NEWS OF GOD'S LOVE

*"No one has greater love than this,
to lay down one's life for one's friends." (John 15:13)*

Jesus came into this world for one purpose—to give us the good news that God loves us, that God is love, that God loves you and that God loves me. Jesus wants us to love one another as he loves each one of us. Let us love him. How did Jesus love you and me? By giving his life. He gave all that he had, his life, for you and me. He died on the cross because he loves us, and he wants us to love one another as he loves each one of us. When we look at the cross, we know how he loves us. When we look at the manger we know how he loves us, you and me, your family, my family and everybody's family with a tender love. And God loves us with a tender love. That is all that Jesus came to teach us, the tender love of God.

—St. Mother Teresa

Jesus, help me consider your cross as the sign of your love.

5TH SUNDAY OF LENT

THROUGH DEATH TO NEW LIFE

*"Christ himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that,
free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds
you have been healed." (1 Peter 2:24)*

The immense suffering of humanity can easily be understood as a sign of God's wrath, as a punishment. And we, looking at the horrors that plague our world, are saying, "How can there be a loving God when all this is happening?" Jesus, however, took upon himself all this suffering and lifted it up on the cross, not as a curse but as a blessing. Jesus made the cup of God's wrath into a cup of blessings. That's the mystery of the Eucharist. Jesus died for us so that we may live. He poured out his blood for us so that we may find new life. He gave himself away for us, so that we can live in community. He became for us food and drink so that we can be fed for everlasting life. Our suffering can no longer



be a divine punishment. Jesus transformed it as the way to new life. His blood, and ours too, now can become martyr's blood—blood that witnesses to a new covenant, a new communion, a new community.

—Henri J.M. Nouwen

Jesus, help me appreciate the new life beginning in me this Lent.

MONDAY, WEEK 5

HE SUFFERED FOR ME

“We proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but... God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength.”

(1 Corinthians 1:24-25)

We expect God in His omnipotence to defeat injustice, evil, sin and suffering with a triumphant divine victory. Yet God shows us a humble victory that, in human terms, appears to be failure. We can say that God conquers in failure! Indeed, the Son of God appears on the cross as a defeated man: he suffers, is betrayed, reviled and finally



dies. But Jesus allows evil to be unleashed on him and he takes it upon himself in order to conquer it. His passion is not an accident. Truly we cannot find many explanations. It is a puzzling mystery, the mystery of God’s great humility: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son” (John 3:16). This week let us think deeply about the suffering of Jesus and let us say to ourselves: this is for my sake. Even if I had been the only person

in the world, he would have done it. He did it for me. Let us kiss the crucifix and say: for my sake, thank you Jesus.

—Pope Francis

Jesus, help me understand how much love motivated you to suffer and die on the cross.

real presences. Dare to love and to be a real friend. The love you give and receive is a reality that will lead you closer and closer to God as well as to those whom God has given you to love.

—Henri J.M. Nouwen

Jesus, help me dare to love and be a real friend no matter how hard it might seem. Today I will...

THURSDAY, WEEK 5

CHRIST TRANSFORMS SUFFERING

“He was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed.” (Isaiah 53:5)

Within our suffering is the suffering of Christ who bears its burden with us and reveals its meaning. When the Son of God mounted the cross, he destroyed the solitude of suffering and illuminated its darkness. We thus find ourselves before the mystery of God’s love for us, which gives us hope and courage: hope, because in the plan of God’s love even the night of pain yields to the light of Easter, and courage, which enables us to confront every hardship in his company, in union with him. The incarnate Son of God did not remove illness and suffering from human experience but by taking them upon himself he transformed them and gave them new meaning. New meaning because they no longer have the last word which, instead, is new and abundant life; transformed them, because in union with Christ they need no longer be negative but positive.



—Pope Francis

Jesus, help me transform my suffering by knowing you are with me.

FRIDAY, WEEK 5

SUFFERING WITH CHRIST

“Christ shared flesh and blood, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death.” (Hebrews 2:14-15)

Suffering in itself is nothing; but suffering that is sharing in the passion of Christ is a wonderful gift, the most beautiful gift: a gift and proof of love, because in giving us his Son the Father showed that he loves the world. So, it proved that this was a gift, the greatest gift of love, because his suffering was the expiation for sin. The suffering in the world is like an enormous Calvary, where the Body of Christ is crucified once more. When suffering overtakes us, let us accept it with a smile. This is the greatest gift of God: having the courage to accept with a smile whatever God gives us and whatever God takes from us. Jesus, my suffering Lord, grant that today and every day I may see you in the person of your sick ones, and that in caring for them I may serve you.

—St. Mother Teresa

Jesus, help me accept the crosses you give me and help others to bear theirs.

SATURDAY, WEEK 5

NEW LIFE BREAKING THROUGH

“This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day.” (John 6:40)

Resurrection is not just life after death. First of all, it is the new life that bursts forth in Jesus' passion, in his waiting. Jesus' suffering mysteriously reveals that the resurrection is breaking through even in the midst of the passion. The glory of God, the divinity of God, is bursting through in Jesus' passion precisely when he is most victimized. So new life becomes visible not only in the resurrection on the third day, but already in the passion, in the being handed over. Why? This is because it is in the passion that the fullness of Jesus' love shines through. It is a waiting



love, a love that does not seek control. When we allow ourselves to feel fully how we are being acted upon, we can come in touch with a new life that we were not even aware was there.

—Henri J.M. Nouwen

Jesus, help me be attentive to the new life breaking into my life this Lent.

PASSION/PALM SUNDAY OF LENT

A NEW KIND OF KING

“I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting.”
(Isaiah 50:6)

Why does Jesus enter Jerusalem? Or better: how does he enter? The crowds acclaim him as king. And he does not deny it or tell them to be silent. But what kind of a king is he? He rides on a donkey, not accompanied by a court, not surrounded by an army as a symbol of power. He is received by humble people, simple folk who have the sense to see something more in Jesus. They have that sense of the faith which says: here is the savior. Jesus does not enter the holy city to receive the honors reserved to earthly kings, to the powerful, to rulers. He enters to be scourged, insulted and abused, as Isaiah foretold. He enters to receive a crown of thorns, a staff, a purple robe: his kingship becomes an object of derision. He enters to climb Calvary, carrying his burden of wood. Jesus enters Jerusalem in order to die on the cross. And it is precisely here that his kingship shines forth in godly fashion: his royal throne is the wood of the cross!

—Pope Francis

Jesus, help me deepen my faith to recognize you as my savior too.

MONDAY HOLY WEEK

CHRIST EMPTIED HIMSELF

*“He emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.”
(Philippians 2:6-7)*

Christ being rich emptied himself. This is where contradiction lies. If I want to be poor like Christ—who became poor even though he was rich—I must do the same. Nowadays people want to be poor and live with the poor, but they want to be free to dispose of things as they wish. To have this freedom is to be rich. They want both and they cannot have both. This is another kind of contradiction. The moment I use and dispose of things as mine, that moment I cease to be poor. We must strive to acquire the true spirit of poverty which manifests itself in a love for the practice of the virtue of poverty in imitation of Christ who chose it as the compassion of his life on earth. He did not have to lead a life of poverty. Thus he taught us how important it is for our sanctification.

—St. Mother Teresa

Jesus, help me in the spirit of poverty to empty myself to be more like you.

TUESDAY HOLY WEEK

YOUR SPIRIT IS WORKING IN ME

“It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20)

Dear Lord, in the midst of much inner turmoil and restlessness, there is a consoling thought: maybe you are working in me in a way I cannot yet feel, experience or understand. My mind is not able to concentrate on you, my heart is not able to remain centered, and it seems as if you are absent and have left me alone. But in faith I cling to you. I believe that your Spirit reaches deeper and further than my mind or heart, and that profound movements are not the first to be noticed.



Therefore, Lord, I promise I will not run away, not give up, not stop praying, even when it all seems' useless, pointless, and a waste of time and effort. I want to let you know that I love you even though I do not feel loved by you, and that I hope in you even though I often experience despair. Let this be a little dying I can do with you and for you as a way of experiencing some solidarity with the millions in this world who suffer far more than I do.

—Henri J.M. Nouwen

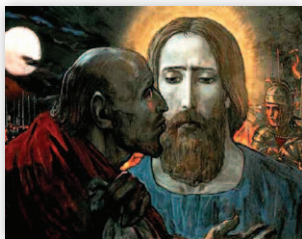
Jesus, help me discover how you have been quietly working in me this Lent.

WEDNESDAY HOLY WEEK

WILL YOU BETRAY ME?

“While they were eating, Jesus said, ‘Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me.’ And they became greatly distressed and began to say to him one after another, ‘Surely not I, Lord?’” (Matthew 26:22-23)

Today, midway through Holy Week, the liturgy presents us with a regrettable episode: the account of the betrayal of Judas, who goes to the leaders of the Sanhedrin to bargain for and deliver his master to them: “What will you give me if I deliver him to you?” At that moment, a price was set on Jesus. This tragic act marks the beginning of Christ’s passion, a dolorous path which he chooses with absolute freedom. He himself says it clearly: “I lay down my life. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again” (John 10:17-18). And thus by this betrayal Jesus’ journey of humiliation and despoliation begins. As though he were an article for sale: this one costs 30 pieces of silver. Once he has taken the path of humiliation and self-abandonment, Jesus travels along it to the very end.



—Pope Francis

Jesus, help me not to betray you and my progress this Lent.

HOLY THURSDAY
NOT ME LORD!

“You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you” (John 13:13-15)

O, Lord, you kneel before me; you hold my naked feet in your hands, and you look up at me and smile. Within me I feel the protest arising, “No, Lord, you shall never wash my feet.” It is as if I were resisting the love you offer me. I want to say, “You don’t really know me, my dark feelings, my pride, my lust, my greed. I may speak the right words, but my heart is so far from you. No, I am not good enough to belong to you. You must have someone else in mind, not me.” But you look at me with utter tenderness, saying, “I want you to be with me. I want you to have a full share in my life. I want you to belong to me as much as I belong to my Father. I want to wash you completely clean so that you and I can be one and so that you can do to others what I have done to you.” I have to let go of all my fears, distrust, doubts and anguish and simply let you wash me clean and make me your friend whom you love with a love that has no bounds.



—Henri J.M. Nouwen

Jesus, help me to give up my resistance to your love so I can be more like you.

GOOD FRIDAY
HE SUFFERED FOR US

“Through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.” (Colossians 1:20)

Jesus attains complete humiliation through “death on the cross.” It was the worst form of death, that reserved for slaves and criminals. Jesus was considered a prophet but he died like a criminal. As we contemplate Jesus in his passion, we see reflected the suffering of humanity and we discover the divine answer to the mystery of evil,

suffering and death. Many times we feel horror at the evil and suffering that surrounds us and we ask ourselves: “Why does God allow it?” It deeply wounds us to see suffering and death, especially that of the innocent! When we see children suffer it wounds our hearts: it is the mystery of evil. And Jesus takes all of this evil, all of this suffering upon himself. Today it would benefit all of us to look at the crucifix, to kiss the wounds of Jesus, to kiss them on the crucifix. He took upon himself all human suffering, he clothed himself in this suffering.

—Pope Francis

Jesus, help me thank you for your complete faithfulness and love for God and God's ways.

HOLY SATURDAY

GIVING OURSELVES COMPLETELY TO GOD

“We have been buried with Christ Jesus by baptism into death, so that, just as he was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.” (Romans 6:3-4)

Today I really felt a deep joy that Jesus can't go anymore through the agony, but that he wants to go through it in me. More than ever I surrender myself to him. Yes, more than ever I will be at his disposal.



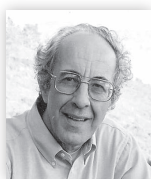
Total surrender consists in giving ourselves completely to God, because God has given himself to us. If God owes nothing to us and is ready to impart to us no less than himself, shall we answer with just a fraction of ourselves? I give up my own self and in this way induce God to live for me. Therefore to possess God we must allow him to possess our souls. How poor we would be if God had not given us the power of giving ourselves to him. How rich we are now. How easy it is to conquer God. We give ourselves to him, then God is ours, and there can be nothing more ours than God.

—St. Mother Teresa

Jesus, help me give myself wholly to you and to your service.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Excerpts are taken and adapted from the following sources:



Henri J.M. Nouwen: *A Cry for Mercy* (Doubleday, 1981); *Can You Drink the Cup?* (Ave Maria, 1996); *Finding My Way Home* (Crossroad, 2001); *Gracias!* (Harper & Row, 1983); *Heart Speaks to Heart* (Ave Maria Press, 1989); *Here and Now* (Crossroad, 1994); *Jesus: A Gospel* (Orbis, 2001); *The Inner Voice of Love* (Doubleday, 1996); *The Only Necessary Thing* (Crossroad, 1999); *The Return of the Prodigal Son* (Doubleday, 1994); *The Road to Daybreak* (Doubleday, 1988); *The Road to Peace: Writings on Peace and Justice*, John Dear, ed. (Orbis, 1998).



St. Mother Teresa: *A Gift for God* (Harper & Row, 1975); *Come Be My Light* (Doubleday, 2007); *Everything Starts from Prayer* (White Cloud Press, 1998); *Heart of Joy* (Servant, 1987); *In My Own Words* (Liguori, 1995); *Jesus, the Word to Be Spoken* (Servant, 1998); *Life in the Spirit* (Harper & Row, 1983); *Love: A Fruit Always in Season* (Ignatius Press, 1987); *The Love of Christ* (Harper & Row, 1982); *Total Surrender* (Servant, 1985).



Pope Francis: Reflections adapted from the encyclicals, apostolic exhortations, weekly papal audiences, addresses and homilies of Pope Francis.

EASTER SUNDAY

JESUS IS RISEN

*“Why do you look for the living among the dead?
He is not here, but has risen.” (Luke 24:5)*

What does it mean that Jesus is risen? It means that the love of God is stronger than evil and death itself and that the love of God can transform our lives and let those desert places in our hearts bloom. God’s love can do this! Jesus did not return to his former earthly life, but entered into the glorious life of God with our humanity, opening us to a future of hope. He no longer belongs to the past, but lives in the present and is projected towards the future. God’s newness appears to us as victory over sin, evil and death, over everything that crushes life and makes it seem less human. Let the risen Jesus enter your life. Welcome him as a friend, with trust: he is life! If up till now you have kept him at a distance, step forward. He will receive you with open arms. If you have been indifferent, take a risk. You won’t be disappointed. If following him seems difficult, don’t be afraid, trust him, be confident that he is close to you. He is with you and will give you the peace you are looking for and the strength to live as he would have you do.

—*Pope Francis*

Jesus, help me welcome you more fully into my life and follow you each day.

