

CALLED *to Be*  
HOLY

Daily Lenten Reflections

POPE ST. JOHN PAUL II, POPE BENEDICT XVI  
AND POPE FRANCIS

## INTRODUCTION

St. Paul reminded his Corinthian community that as Christians they had been “called to be holy” (1 Cor 1:2). Holiness is the unique quality that makes God divine and different from all created realities. Thus we cannot become holy on our own but only through contact with God, which transforms a person, place or thing into something sacred. During Lent we are invited to focus on God’s presence and on our desire for conversion and transformation into greater holiness. Pope St. John Paul II noted that “Lent is an effort to purify the heart of the sin that burdens it. To live Lent means conversion to God by means of Jesus Christ.” Pope Benedict XVI encouraged us to make Lent “a time to effect a deep conversion in our lives and so be transformed by the action of the Holy Spirit.” And Pope Francis reminded us that “Lent is a favorable season for deepening our spiritual life through the means of sanctification offered us by the Church: fasting, prayer and almsgiving. At the basis of everything is the word of God, which during this season we are invited to hear and ponder more deeply.” So let us embark on our journey of conversion using the reflections of these three popes to guide us into greater contact with God and thus greater holiness of life.

—*Steve Mueller, Editor*

Ash Wednesday

## RENEWING OUR COMMITMENT TO HOLINESS

“Sanctify yourselves and be holy; for I, the LORD,  
your God, am holy.” (Leviticus 20:7)

Today we begin a 40-day journey in preparation for Easter, with the austere sign of the imposition of ashes coupled with Christ’s words: “Repent and believe in the gospel.” The Church reminds us of our condition as sinners and our need for repentance and conversion with its pressing call to reject evil and to do good. Lent, the providential time for conversion, helps us to contemplate the stupendous mystery of God’s love. It is a return to the roots of our faith, so that by pondering the measureless gift of grace, we cannot fail to realize that all has been given to us by God’s loving initiative. In the very love which God has for us, there lies the call to give ourselves freely to others in turn. Today a renewed commitment to holiness is more necessary than ever.

—Pope St. John Paul II

*How might I best respond this Lent to God’s many loving gifts to me?*



Thursday after Ash Wednesday

## RENEWING OUR COMMITMENT TO CONVERSION

“Be careful, therefore, to observe my statutes.  
I, the LORD, make you holy.” (Leviticus 20:8)

We begin our Lenten journey, as we do every year, motivated by a more intense spirit of prayer and reflection, penance and fasting. Through the traditional practices of fasting, almsgiving and prayer, which are an expression of our commitment to conversion, Lent teaches us how to live the love of Christ in an ever more radical way. Fasting, which can have various motivations, takes on a profoundly religious significance for the Christian: by rendering our table poorer, we learn to overcome selfishness in order to live in the logic of gift and love. By bearing some form of deprivation—and not just what is in excess—we learn to look away from our “ego” to discover Someone close to us and to recognize God in the face of so many brothers and sisters. For Christians, fasting, far

from being depressing, opens us ever more to God and to the needs of others, thus allowing love of God to become also love of our neighbor.

—Pope Benedict XVI

*From what selfishness might I fast this Lent to open myself to God?*



Friday after Ash Wednesday

## A TIME TO SAY “NO”

“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”

(James 4:7)

In this season of grace we want to turn our eyes to God’s mercy and return to the merciful heart of the Father. Lent is a path leading to the triumph of mercy over all that would crush us or reduce us to something unworthy of our dignity as God’s children. Lent is the road leading from slavery to freedom, from suffering to joy, from death to life. So Lent is the time for saying “no.” “No” to indifference, thinking that other people’s lives are not my concern, and every attempt to trivialize life, especially the lives of those who are burdened by so much superficiality. Lent means saying “no” to the toxic pollution of empty and meaningless words, of harsh and hasty criticism, of simplistic analyses that fail to grasp the complexity of problems, especially the problems of those who suffer the most. Lent is the time to say “no” to the prayer that soothes our conscience, to almsgiving that leaves us self-satisfied, to fasting that makes us feel good. Lent is the time to say “no” to all those forms of spirituality that reduce the faith to a ghetto culture, a culture of exclusion.

—Pope Francis

*What do I most need to say “no” to so I can follow Christ more closely?*



Saturday after Ash Wednesday

## A TIME FOR WIDENING OUR HEARTS

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.” (Matthew 6:9-10)

Lent is the acceptable time for our sanctification. Prayer is the fundamental condition for conversion, spiritual progress and holiness. Praying is meant to open us up to God and our neighbor, not only in words but also in action. That is why Christian spirituality, following Jesus

himself, associates prayer with fasting and almsgiving. A life of self-denial and charity is a sign of conversion to God's way of thinking, to God's way of loving. By humbling ourselves through penance, we open ourselves to God. By giving in charity, we open ourselves to our neighbor. Prayer is an expression of our desires. Beset as we are by human weakness, we naturally ask God for many things. We may be tempted to think that God does not hear or answer us, but God is always listening to us and answering us—but from the perspective of a love far greater and a knowledge far deeper than our own. The challenge is to widen our hearts by hallowing God's name, by seeking God's kingdom, and by accepting God's will.

—Pope St. John Paul II

*How might I set aside more time each day for prayer during this Lent?*



First Sunday of Lent

## REJECTING FALSE IMAGES OF BEING GOD'S SON

“Do not subject us to the final test, but deliver us from the evil one.” (Matthew 6:9)

After being anointed with the Holy Spirit at his baptism, Jesus was led into the wilderness by the Spirit to be tempted by the devil. At the beginning of his public ministry, he had to reject the false images of the messiah which the tempter was suggesting to him. Yet these temptations are also false images of ourselves that threaten to ensnare our conscience in the guise of suitable, effective and even good proposals. Their essential core is always the exploitation of God for our own interests, giving preference to success or to material possessions. The cunning tempter does not directly impel us towards evil but rather towards a false good, making us believe that the true realities are power and everything that satisfies our primary needs. Thus God becomes secondary and no longer counts and so disappears. At the crucial moments in life, we stand at a crossroads: do we want to follow our own ego or God? To follow our individual interests or what is really good? Let us not be afraid of facing the battle against the spirit of evil and fight it with Jesus.

—Pope Benedict XVI

*What most tempts me to center on myself and my interests and not on God?*

Monday, Week 1

## A TIME FOR SPIRITUAL COMBAT

“The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan.” (Mark 1:12-13)

In Jesus’ 40 days of solitude in the wilderness, he confronts Satan, unmasks his temptations and conquers him. Lent is a time of spiritual combat against the spirit of evil. We place ourselves decisively on the path of Jesus that leads to life. His path passes through the desert where the voice of God and the voice of the tempter can both be heard, where our destiny is truly played out, life or death. And how do we hear God’s voice? We hear it in his Word. For this reason, it is important to know Scripture, because otherwise we do not know how to react to the snares of the evil one. So read the Gospel every day! Meditate on it for a little while. And also carry it with you in your pocket or your purse. The Lenten desert helps us to say “no” to worldliness and its “idols,” and helps us make courageous choices in accordance with the Gospel and strengthen solidarity with others.

—Pope Francis

*How might I rely on Scripture to find ways to confront evil as Jesus did?*



Tuesday, Week 1

## RESISTING TEMPTATION

“Your opponent the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in faith.” (1 Peter 5:8-9)

Why does sin always give rise to conflict with God? Sin is the source of internal division, and all of human life (individual and social) shows itself to be a dramatic struggle between good and evil, between light and darkness. Conversion means breaking away from evil and from sin. We must be radical with sin. The way has been dramatically presented in



Jesus' temptations in the desert. We see him reject the deception of selfish ambition and pride to fully obey his divine call. By renouncing all ambition he fulfills God's Word and submits to the Father's will. Jesus overcame the temptation of independence from God. He rejected the temptation to work wonders on his own. He also rejected vain ambition and lust for power. By overcoming these three temptations which the people of Israel had fallen into while wandering in the desert, Jesus gave us an example of how we are to act when confronted by similar deceptions.

—Pope St. John Paul II

*What temptations are most challenging for me today?  
How can I overcome them?*



Wednesday, Week 1

## GUIDED BY GOD'S WORD

"Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light for my path." (Psalm 119:105)

In order to undertake more seriously our journey towards Easter and prepare ourselves to celebrate the resurrection of the Lord, what could be more appropriate than allowing ourselves to be guided by God's Word? By meditating and internalizing the Word in order to live it every day, we learn a precious and irreplaceable form of prayer. By attentively listening to God, who continues to speak to our hearts, we nourish the itinerary of faith initiated on the day of our Baptism. Prayer also allows us to gain a new concept of time: without the perspective of eternity and transcendence, in fact, time simply directs our steps towards a horizon without a future. Instead, when we pray, we find time for God, to understand that his "words will not pass away" (Mk 13:31), to enter into that intimate communion with him "that no one shall take from you" (Jn 16:22), opening us to the hope that does not disappoint—eternal life.

—Pope Benedict XVI

*How am I being more dedicated to reading and praying  
over Scripture this Lent?*

Thursday, Week 1

## WHAT MUST I CHANGE?

“Oh, that today you would hear his voice and harden not your hearts.”  
(Hebrews 4:7)

In God’s presence, during a recollected reading of the Gospel text, it is good to ask, for example: “Lord, what does this text say to me? What about my life do you want to change by it? What troubles me about it? Why am I not interested in it? Or perhaps: What do I find pleasant in this text? What is it about this word that moves me? attracts me? Why does it attract me?” When we make an effort to listen to God, temptations usually arise. One of them is simply to feel troubled or burdened, and turn away. Another is to think about what the text means for other people, and so avoid applying it to our own life. We can also look for excuses to water down the text’s clear meaning. God always invites us to take a step forward, but does not demand a full response if we are not yet ready, only asking that we sincerely look at our life and present ourselves honestly before him, and that we be willing to continue to grow, asking from God what we ourselves cannot as yet achieve.

—Pope Francis

*How might I better open my mind and heart to listen  
and respond to Jesus’ gospel message?*



Friday, Week 1

## LISTENING TO GOD’S WORD

“LORD, when I found your words, I devoured them; your words were my joy,  
the happiness of my heart.” (Jeremiah 15:16)

Listening to God’s word is the most important thing in our lives. Christ is always in our midst and desires to speak to our hearts. We can listen to him by meditating with faith on sacred Scripture, by recollection in private and communal prayer, by silent meditation before the tabernacle, from which he speaks to us of his love. Christians, especially on Sundays, are called to meet and listen to the Lord. This happens most completely through participation in the Mass, and during sacred services, during which Christ prepares the banquet of the Word and the bread of life for the faithful, but other moments of prayer and reflection, of rest and community can also be profitably combined to make the Lord’s



day holy. When through the action of the Holy Spirit God dwells in the heart of believers, it becomes easier for them to serve others.

—Pope St. John Paul II

*How has my listening to God's Word most prompted me  
to act more in service to others?*



Saturday, Week 1

## FIX OUR GAZE ON CHRIST

“Have I been with you for so long a time and you still do not know me?  
Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.” (John 14:9)

During this Lenten time we need to keep our gaze fixed upon Jesus Christ, the “pioneer and perfecter of our faith” (Heb 12:2). In him, all the anguish and longing of the human heart finds fulfillment. The joy of love, the answer to the drama of suffering and pain, the power of forgiveness in the face of an offense received and the victory of life over the emptiness of death: all this finds fulfillment in the mystery of his Incarnation—in his becoming human, in his sharing our human weakness so as to transform it by the power of his resurrection—and in the mystery of his death and resurrection by which he redeemed the world.

—Pope Benedict XVI

*How might I better imitate Jesus' faithfulness  
to God and God's desire for right relationships?*



Second Sunday of Lent

## WE MUST LISTEN TO JESUS

“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.”  
(Matthew 17:5)

In the account of Jesus' transfiguration, the mountain represents a place close to God and suitable for an intimate encounter with God, a place of prayer where one stands in God's presence. There Jesus is revealed to the three disciples as transfigured, luminescent and most beautiful. And then Moses and Elijah appear and converse with him. His face is so resplendent and his robes so white that Peter, awe-struck, wishes to stay there, as if to stop time. Suddenly from on high the Father's voice resounds proclaiming Jesus to be his most beloved Son, saying “listen to

him.” This word is important! God our Father said this to these apostles, and says it to us as well: “listen to Jesus, because he is my beloved Son.” This week let us keep this word in our minds and in our hearts: “listen to Jesus!” God the Father says it to everyone: to me, to you, to everyone! It is like an aid for going forward on the path of Lent. “Listen to Jesus!”  
—*Pope Francis*

*How might I set aside more time each day to listen to Jesus’ words in Scripture?*



Monday, Week 2

## OUR JOURNEY OF TRANSFORMATION

“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” (John 8:12)

Peter, James, and John were witnesses of Jesus’ extraordinary transfiguration. The Gospel recounts that Jesus took them apart and led them with him up a high mountain. The disciples’ ascent to Tabor spurs us to reflect on the penitential journey of these days. Lent is also an upward path. It is an invitation to rediscover the calming and regenerating silence of meditation. It is an effort to purify the heart of the sin that burdens it. It is certainly a demanding journey, but one that leads us toward a goal rich in beauty, splendor and joy. In the Transfiguration the heavenly Father’s voice commands us to “listen to Jesus.” These words contain the whole program for Lent: we must listen to Jesus. He reveals the Father to us, because, as the eternal Son, he is “the image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15).

—*Pope St. John Paul II*

*What have I most learned by listening to Jesus this Lent?*



Tuesday, Week 2

## SPENDING TIME IN GOD’S PRESENCE

“Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” (John 6:68)

Jesus’ Transfiguration puts before our eyes the glory of Christ, which anticipates the resurrection and announces the divinization of human persons. We become aware that in this Lent Jesus leads us, like the apostles Peter, James and John “up a high mountain by themselves” (Mt 17:1), to receive once again in Christ, as sons and daughters in the Son, the gift

of the grace of God: “This is my Son, the beloved; he enjoys my favor. Listen to him” (Mt 17:5). We are invited to distance ourselves from the noisiness of everyday life in order to immerse ourselves in God’s presence. God desires to hand down to us, each day, a Word that penetrates the depths of our spirit, where we discern good from evil (Heb 4:12), reinforcing our will to follow the Lord on our Lenten journey of authentic conversion to make room for God and see daily reality with God’s eyes.

—Pope Benedict XVI

*How has scripture and prayer helped me see reality with God’s eyes and values?*



Wednesday, Week 2

## A TIME TO OPEN OUR HEARTS

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

Lent is the journey of the people of God toward Easter, a journey of conversion, of struggling against evil with the weapons of prayer, fasting and works of charity. Conversion of heart is the chief characteristic of this 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 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 comfort zones. 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 always involves the cross and self-denial.

—Pope Francis

*What is most helping me center myself more on God and God’s ways this Lent?*

Thursday, Week 2

## GROWING CLOSER TO GOD THROUGH PRAYER

“To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul, my God, in you I trust.” (Psalm 25:1)

In the Gospel Christ himself indicates to us the rich program of conversion and also the means that serve for this conversion—in the first place prayer, then almsgiving and fasting. We must accept and introduce these means into our lives in proportion to the needs and possibilities of our times and circumstances. Prayer always remains the first and fundamental condition of approach to God. During Lent we must make an effort to pray more, to look for the time and the place to pray. It is prayer in the first place that brings us out of indifference and makes us sensitive to the things of God and the soul. Prayer also educates our consciences, and Lent is a particularly suitable time to reawaken and educate conscience. The Church also reminds us of the indispensable necessity of sacramental confession, in order that we may be able to live the resurrection of Christ not only in the liturgy, but also in our own soul.

—Pope St. John Paul II

*How has my dedication to prayer this Lent most changed me?*



Friday, Week 2

## PRAYING WITH GOD'S WORD

“Let my cry come before you, LORD; in keeping with your word,  
give me understanding.” (Psalm 119:169)

The word of God is at the basis of all authentic Christian spirituality. A prayerful approach to the sacred text is a fundamental element in the spiritual life of every believer. Understanding Scripture demands, even more than study, closeness to Christ and prayer. By applying yourself to search diligently and with unshakable trust in God for the meaning of the divine Scriptures, you will discover what is hidden in great fullness within. You ought not, however, to be satisfied merely with knocking and seeking: to understand the things of God, what is absolutely necessary is prayer. Prayer, as petition, intercession, thanksgiving and praise, is the primary way by which the Word transforms us. Remember too that God's Word is given to us precisely to build communion, to unite

us in the truth along our way to God. While it is a Word addressed to each of us personally, it is also a Word which builds community, which builds the Church.

—Pope Benedict XVI

*How has my Lenten prayer most helped me deepen  
my relationships with others?*



Saturday, Week 2

## LISTENING IN SILENCE

“Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.” (1 Samuel 3:9)

We must first of all dispose ourselves to listen to God’s Word. This means rediscovering the value of silence to meditate on the Word that comes to us. We only devote periods of quiet time to the things or the people whom we love, and here we are speaking of the God whom we love and who wishes to speak to us. Because of this love, we can take as much time as we need. We need to practice the art of listening, which is more than simply hearing. Listening is an openness of heart which makes possible that closeness without which genuine spiritual encounter cannot occur. Listening helps us find the right gesture and word that shows we are more than simply bystanders. Only through such respectful and compassionate listening can we enter on the paths of true growth and awaken a yearning for the Christian ideal: the desire to respond fully to God’s love and to bring to fruition what he has sown in our lives.

—Pope Francis

*How might I find a silent time each day to listen more intently to God’s Word?*



Third Sunday of Lent

## LORD, GIVE ME THIS WATER

“Whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst; the water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” (John 4:14)

Christ asks the Samaritan woman for a drink. His material thirst symbolizes a far deeper reality. It expresses his ardent desire that his dialogue partner and her fellow-citizens will open themselves to faith. When she asks Christ for water, she is basically revealing the need for a satisfying relationship with God present in every heart. And the Lord is revealed

as the one who offers the living water of the Spirit, that satisfies forever the infinite thirst of every human being. The episode of the Samaritan woman charts the journey of faith that we are all called to pursue. Even today Jesus continues “to thirst,” namely, to desire humanity’s faith and love. Our attachment to his message of salvation and the desire to spread it in the world come from our personal encounter with him, if we recognize and receive him as the messiah. Revelation received with faith asks to become a word proclaimed to others, witnessed in the concrete choices of life. This is the mission of believers, coming from and growing in their personal meeting with the Lord.

—Pope St. John Paul II

*How has my understanding of Jesus most changed my attitudes  
and behavior toward others?*



Monday, Week 3

## BE DOERS OF THE WORD, NOT JUST HEARERS

“The word of God is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating even between soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and able to discern reflections and thoughts of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12)

God’s Word sheds light on human existence and stirs our conscience to take a deeper look at our lives. The Gospel reminds us that every moment of our life is important and must be lived intensely, in the knowledge that everyone will have to give an account of his or her life. The Word of God itself emphasizes the need for our engagement in the world and our responsibility before Christ, the Lord of history. As we proclaim the gospel, let us encourage one another to do good and to commit ourselves to justice, reconciliation and peace, which finds its ultimate foundation and fulfilment in the love revealed to us in Christ. Whoever claims to have understood the Scriptures without striving as a

result to grow in this twofold love of God and neighbor, makes it clear that he or she has not yet understood them.

—Pope Benedict XVI

*How has my understanding of the Gospel most changed my commitment to justice, reconciliation and peace?*



Tuesday, Week 3

## THE GRACE OF CHRIST

“You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.”

(2 Corinthians 8:9).

Regarding our path of conversion as individuals and as a community, Christ’s poverty shows how God works. Jesus does not reveal himself cloaked in worldly power and wealth but rather in weakness and poverty. He chose to be poor. He came amongst us and drew near to each of us. He set aside his glory and emptied himself so that he could be like us in all things. We can do this to the extent that we imitate Christ who became poor and enriched us by his poverty. Lent is a fitting time for self-denial. We would do well to ask ourselves what we can give up in order to help and enrich others by our own poverty. In a society so often intoxicated by consumerism and hedonism, wealth and extravagance, appearances and narcissism, Jesus calls us to act in a way that is simple, balanced, consistent and capable of seeing and doing what is essential.

—Pope Francis

*How might I best imitate Christ’s self-denial in my actions this Lent?*



Wednesday, Week 3

## THE CHALLENGE OF DAILY CONVERSION

“Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect” (Romans 12:2).

We must all be converted anew every day. This is a fundamental demand of the gospel, addressed to everyone. Being converted means returning to the very grace of our vocation. It means meditating on the infinite



goodness and love of Christ, who has addressed each of us and, calling us by name, has said: “Follow me.” Being converted means continually giving an account before the Lord of our hearts about our service, our zeal, and our fidelity, for we are called to be “servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God” (1 Cor 4:1). Being converted also means “giving an account” of our negligences and sins, of our timidity, of our lack of faith and hope, of our thinking only “in a human way.” Being converted means seeking again the pardon and strength of God in the sacrament of reconciliation, and thus always beginning anew, and every day progressing. Being converted means “to pray continually and never lose heart” (Lk 18:1).

—Pope St. John Paul II

*What account might I give of my conversion journey so far this Lent?*



Thursday, Week 3

## I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS

“Behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20)

Being Christians is always achieved by becoming Christians over and over again. It is never a story that is over once and for all but rather a journey which requires us to start out constantly anew. The invitation to conversion is an incentive to let oneself be won over by Jesus (Phil 3:12) and to return with him to the Father. We are Christians only if we encounter Christ. Of course, he might not show himself to us in an overwhelming, luminous way, as he did to St. Paul. But we too can encounter Christ in reading sacred Scripture, in prayer, in the liturgical life of the Church. We can touch Christ’s heart and feel him touching ours. Only in this personal relationship with Christ, only in this encounter with the risen one do we truly become Christians. Therefore let us pray for the Lord to illumine us, to grant us an encounter with his presence in our world, and thus to grant us a lively faith, an open heart and great love for all, which is capable of renewing the world.

—Pope Benedict XVI

*How have I encountered Christ this Lent in scripture,  
in the sacraments and in other people?*

Friday, Week 3

## CONVERSION OF HEART

“Yet even now, says the LORD, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.” (Joel 2:12)

Conversion of heart is the chief characteristic of this Lenten season of grace. The Gospel challenges all of us, and it reminds us that conversion is not to be reduced to outward forms or vague intentions, but 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,” opening oneself to God and to others. We know that this increasingly artificial world would have us live in a culture of “doing,” of the “useful,” where we exclude God from our horizon without realizing it. But we also exclude the horizon itself! Lent beckons us to rouse ourselves, to remind ourselves that we are creatures, simply put, that we are not God.

—Pope Francis

*How might I open my heart more to the needs of those closest to me today?*



Saturday, Week 3

## DEEPENING OUR CONTACT WITH GOD

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.” (Colossians 3:16)

During Lent we are offered an opportunity to pay greater attention to the needs of the spirit and listen more attentively to God’s Word, which will reveal to us the horizons of the Lord’s love, enrich us with deeper spirituality that will lead us then to live our regular activities with a renewed soul. Sacred Scripture is a pure and lasting fount of spiritual life, and the supreme rule of our faith. It is like thirst-quenching water and food that nourishes the life of believers. We must cultivate a more intense and frequent contact with God’s Word, letting its healing and creative power work in us. Learning to read Sacred Scripture is fundamental for the believer: it is the first step of a ladder, which continues with meditation and, thus with real prayer. Prayer based on biblical reading is the principal way of Christian spirituality.

—Pope St. John Paul II

*How have I experienced the healing power of God’s Word this Lent?*

Fourth Sunday of Lent

## EYES TO SEE AS JESUS DOES

“I came into this world for judgment, so that those who do not see might see, and those who do see might become blind.” (John 9:39)

Jesus’ healing of the man born blind sparked heated debate because Jesus did it on the Sabbath, which in the Pharisees’ opinion violated the feast-day precept. Thus Jesus and the blind man are both cast out, the former because he broke the law and the latter because, despite being healed, he remained marked as a sinner from birth. But Jesus reveals to the healed blind man that he had come into the world for judgement, to separate the blind who can be healed from those who do not allow themselves to be healed because they consider themselves healthy. Indeed, the temptation to build himself an ideological security system is strong in people: even religion can become an element of this system, as can atheism or secularism, but in letting this happen one is blinded by one’s own selfishness. Let us allow ourselves to be healed by Jesus, who can and wants to give us God’s light! Let us confess our blindness, our shortsightedness, and especially our pride.

—*Pope Benedict XVI*

*How have I most had my eyes opened by my contact  
with Jesus’ healing power this Lent?*



Monday, Week 4

## KEEPING THE DOOR OPEN

“Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me.” (Revelation 3:20)

Usually when we are healthy and comfortable, we tend to forget about others and their problems, their sufferings and the injustices they endure. Indifference to our neighbor and to God are a real temptation for us Christians. Each year during Lent we need to hear once more the voice of the prophets who cry out and trouble our conscience. God is

not indifferent to our world but so loves it that God gave his Son for our salvation. In the earthly life, death and resurrection of God's son, the gate between God and humanity, between heaven and earth, opened for all. The Church is like the hand holding open this gate, thanks to her proclamation of God's Word, her celebration of the sacraments and her witness of the faith which works through love. But the world tends to withdraw into itself and shut that door through which God comes into the world and the world goes to God. Hence the hand, which is the Church, must never be surprised if it is rejected, crushed and wounded.

—Pope Francis

*How might I “open the door” wider for God to enter into my life?*



Tuesday, Week 4

## JESUS' EXAMPLE OF PRAYER

“I pray for those who will believe in me...so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us.” (John 17:20-21)

Prayer constantly reminds us of the primacy of Christ and, in union with him, the primacy of the interior life and of holiness. In prayer we express our feelings, thoughts and sentiments and open our hearts and our minds to the God who loves us. Prayer makes us one with the Lord. Through prayer we come to share more deeply in God's life and love. One of the most striking things about Jesus was his habit of prayer. In the midst of an active public ministry, he goes away by himself to be alone in silence and communion with his Father. On the Sabbath, he made it a practice to go to the synagogue and pray with others in common. When he was together with his disciples or when he was by himself, he prayed to the Father, whom he dearly loved. If you really wish to follow Christ, if you want your love for him to grow and last, then you must be faithful to prayer. It is the key to the vitality of your life in Christ. Without prayer, your faith and love will die. Set always before yourselves the example of Jesus: carry on a daily conversation with the divine Master, a conversation of openness through his word and a readiness to follow.

—Pope St. John Paul II

*How has my daily prayerful conversation with God most revitalized my relationship with God?*

Wednesday, Week 4

## DEEPENING OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

“If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also, through his Spirit that dwells in you.” (Romans 8:11)

In looking at Jesus’ prayers, we must ask: how do I pray? How much time do I give to my relationship with God? Listening, meditating, and being silent before the Lord who speaks is an art which is learned by practicing it with perseverance. Prayer is of course a gift which nevertheless asks to be accepted. It is a work of God but demands commitment, continuity and constancy on our part. Jesus’ example shows that his prayer, enlivened by the fatherhood of God and by communion with the Spirit, was deepened and prolonged in faithful practice. Let us train ourselves in an intense relationship with God, with prayer that is not occasional but constant, full of faith, capable of illuminating our lives, as Jesus taught us. And let us ask him to enable us to communicate to people who are close to us, to those whom we meet on our way, the joy of the encounter with the Lord.

—Pope Benedict XVI

*How might better I share with others the experience  
of my encounter with God in prayer?*



Thursday, Week 4

## LET JESUS CHANGE YOU

“The LORD your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away his face from you, if you return to him”. (2 Chronicles 30:9)

How many times have we felt the need to effect a change which would involve our entire person! How often do we say to ourselves: “I need to change, I can’t continue this way. My life on this path will not bear fruit. It will be a useless life and I will not be happy.” And Jesus, who is near us, extends his hand and says, “Come, come to me. I’ll do the work, I’ll change your heart, I’ll change your life, I will make you happy.” But do we believe this or not? Jesus, with the Holy Spirit, sows in us this restlessness to change our life and be a little better. Let us accept his invitation and not put up resistance, because only if we open ourselves

to his mercy will we find true life and true joy. All we have to do is open the door wide, and he will do the rest. He does everything, but we must open our heart wide so that he can heal us and make us go forward.

—Pope Francis

*With Jesus' help, what might I most want to change  
about myself and my life now?*



Friday, Week 4

## CHRIST'S HEALING TOUCH

"The lost I will search out, the strays I will bring back, the injured I will bind up, and the sick I will heal, says the LORD." (Ezekiel 34:16).

Illness and suffering are basic problems of human existence. When the sick flocked to Jesus, they recognized in him a friend whose deeply compassionate and loving heart responded to their needs. His cures, however, involved more than just healing sickness. They were also prophetic signs of his own identity and the coming of God's kingdom, and they very often caused a new spiritual awakening in the one who had been healed. Jesus' healing power has not lost its effect in the 2,000-year history of the Church. This ever active power remains a source of healing and reconciliation in Church's life and prayer, and authenticates the Church's proclamation of the God's kingdom of God and its charge by Christ to the care for the poor, the weak, the defenseless, the suffering and those who mourn.

—Pope St. John Paul II

*What do I most want Christ to heal in me and in others today?*



Saturday, Week 4

## PRAYER IS THE BREATH OF OUR SOUL

"The Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit itself intercedes with inexpressible groanings." (Romans 8:26).

In prayer we experience—more than in other aspects of life—our weakness, our poverty, our being creatures, for we are placed before the omnipotence and transcendence of God. And the more we advance in listening and in dialogue with God, so that prayer becomes the daily breath of our souls, the more we also perceive our limitations not only

in everyday life but also in our relationship with God. The need to trust, to rely increasingly upon God, then grows in us. We come to understand that we want to pray, but we do not have the words, the language, to speak with God. We can only open ourselves, set our prayer time at God's disposal, waiting for God to help us enter into true dialogue. And the Holy Spirit helps us in our incapacity, illuminates our minds and warms our hearts, guiding us to turn to God.

—Pope Benedict XVI

*How might I open myself to God's transforming presence in my prayer?*



Fifth Sunday of Lent

## DO NOT BE AFRAID!

"Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest."  
(Matthew 11:28).

We hear directed to each one of us Jesus' words to Lazarus: "Come out!" Come out from the gridlock of hopeless sadness. Unwrap the bandages of fear that impede the journey, the laces of the weaknesses and anxieties that constrain you. Reaffirm that God unties the knots. By following Jesus, we learn not to knot our lives around problems which become tangled. There will always be problems, and when we solve one, another one duly arrives. We can however, find a new stability which is Jesus himself, who is the resurrection and the life. With him, joy abides in our hearts, hope is reborn, suffering is transformed into peace, fear into trust, hardship into an offering of love. And even though burdens may not disappear, there will always be his uplifting hand, his encouraging word saying to each of us: "Come out! Come to me! Do not be afraid!"

—Pope Francis

*What fears or burdens do I most want Jesus to lift from me today?*



Monday, Week 5

## SET APART FOR THE GOSPEL

"I am not ashamed of the gospel. It is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes." (Romans 1:16)

The gospel of Jesus Christ is not an abstraction, a private opinion, a remote spiritual ideal or a mere program for personal growth. It is the



power which can transform the world! It is the living person of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, the reflection of the Father's glory, the incarnate Son who reveals the deepest meaning of our humanity and the noble destiny to which the whole human family is called. Christ has commanded us to let the light of the gospel shine forth in our service to society. How can we profess faith in God's Word, and then refuse to let it inspire and direct our thinking, our activity or decisions, and our responsibilities to one another? For Christians, the service of love, consistently connected with faith and the liturgy, the commitment to justice, the struggle against any oppression and the protection of personal dignity are choices and acts which have a deeply religious spirit, and are true and proper sacrifices pleasing to God.

—Pope St. John Paul II

*How has my reading and praying the Gospels most changed me this Lent?*



Tuesday, Week 5

## EMPOWERED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

“You will receive power when the holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

Every Gospel missionary must always bear in mind this truth: it is the Lord who touches hearts with his word and with his Spirit, calling people to faith and to communion in the Church. Evangelization, to be effective, needs the power of the Spirit, who gives life to proclamation and imbues those who convey it with full conviction. It is a proclamation which, to be complete and faithful, asks to be accompanied by signs and gestures, like the preaching of Jesus. Word, Spirit and truth are therefore inseparable and compete to ensure that the Gospel message is spread effectively. The Church's mission, like that of Christ, is essentially to speak of God, to remember God's sovereignty, to remind all of God's right to what belongs to him, that is, our life. It is therefore an urgent duty for everyone to proclaim Christ and his saving message.

—Pope Benedict XVI

*How might I best proclaim the gospel message in my words and actions today?*

Wednesday, Week 5

## A SIGN OF HOPE

“Hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the holy Spirit that has been given to us.” (Romans 5:5)

A great confrontation occurred at the tomb of Lazarus. On the one hand, there is the great disappointment, the precariousness of our mortal life which, pierced by anguish over death, often experiences defeat and an interior darkness which seems insurmountable. Our soul, created for life, suffers upon hearing that its thirst for eternal good is oppressed by an ancient and dark evil. This is the defeat of the tomb. But on the other hand, there is the hope that conquers death and evil, and which has a name. The name of that hope is Jesus. He neither brings a bit of comfort nor some remedy to prolong life, but rather, proclaims: “I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die” (John 11:25-26). For this reason Jesus commands “Take away the stone” and calls to Lazarus, “Come out!”

—Pope Francis

*When have I been most tempted to give in to the despair  
that often accompanies death?*



Thursday, Week 5

## THE MYSTERY OF JESUS’ EUCHARISTIC PRESENCE

“Jesus took the bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me.’”  
(1 Corinthians 11:23-24)

To contemplate Christ involves being able to recognize him wherever he shows himself in his many forms of presence, but above all in the sacrament of his body and his blood, which makes a special demand

on our faith—the mystery of the real presence. We believe that Jesus is truly present under the eucharistic species. This presence is called “real” not in an exclusive way, as if to suggest that other forms of Christ’s presence are not real, but “par excellence,” because Christ thereby becomes substantially present, whole and entire, in the reality of his body and blood. Truly the Eucharist is a mystery of faith, which surpasses our understanding and can only be received in faith. Faith demands that we approach the Eucharist fully aware that we are approaching Christ himself. The Eucharist is a mystery of presence, the perfect fulfillment of Jesus’ promise to remain with us until the end of the world.

—Pope St. John Paul II

*When have I most experienced Christ’s presence in the eucharistic celebration?*



Friday, Week 5

## TAKING BREAD, BEING TAKEN INTO CHRIST

“Where two or three are gathered together in my name,  
there am I in the midst of them.” (Matthew 18:20).

Through the Eucharist Jesus’ makes himself present in our midst. By making the bread into his body and the wine into his blood, he anticipated his death, accepted it in his heart, and transformed it into an action of love. What on the outside is simply brutal violence—the crucifixion—from within becomes an act of total self-giving love. This is the substantial transformation which was accomplished at the Last Supper and was destined to set in motion a series of transformations leading ultimately to the transformation of the world when God will be all in all (1 Cor 15: 8). The body and blood of Christ are given to us so that we ourselves will be transformed and become the body of Christ, his own flesh and blood. Let us allow ourselves, through the celebration of the Eucharist, to be drawn into that process of transformation that God intends to bring about.

—Pope Benedict XVI

*How have I been most changed by my participation  
in the eucharistic celebration?*

## FOLLOWING THE WAY OF THE CROSS

“The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” (1 Corinthians 1:18)

Today the same confrontation occurs between good and evil, hatred and forgiveness, meekness and violence, which culminated in the crucifixion of Christ. The stations of the cross invite us to enter more deeply into the mystery of Jesus’ death and resurrection. Our Christian faith urges us to look to the cross. How I wish that all men and women of good will would look to the cross if only for a moment! There we can see God’s desire: violence is not answered with violence, death is not answered with the language of death. In the silence of the cross, the uproar of weapons ceases and the language of reconciliation, forgiveness, dialogue and peace is spoken. As we reflect on the various events of the stations using the scriptures, we might ask ourselves: Who am I? Who am I before my Lord? Who am I before the suffering Jesus? Where is my heart? Which of these persons am I like? May these questions remain with us throughout this Holy Week.

—Pope Francis

*How might I take time this week to pray the stations  
of the cross at home or in my parish?*



Passion/Palm Sunday of Lent

## “HOSANNA!” .. “CRUCIFY HIM!”

“If we have died with Christ, we shall also live with him; if we persevere, we shall also reign with him. But if we deny him, he will deny us.” (2 Timothy, 2:11-12)

Holy Week begins with a “Hosanna!” and ends with a “Crucify him!” The palm of triumph and the cross of the passion is the heart of the mystery that we want to proclaim. Jesus gave himself up voluntarily to the passion. He was not crushed by forces greater than himself. He freely faced crucifixion and in death was triumphant. By searching the Father’s will, he realized that his “hour” had come and he accepted it with the free obedience of a Son and with infinite love for human beings. Jesus did not understand his earthly existence as a search for power, as a race for success or a career, as a desire to dominate others. On the contrary, he gave up the privileges of his equality with God, took the form of a

servant, became like us and was obedient to the Father's plan even to his death on the cross. Jesus' work of salvation and liberation continues down the centuries. That is why the Church never tires of acclaiming him in her praise and adoration. Our assembly therefore proclaims once again: "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

—*Pope St. John Paul II*

*How might I imitate Jesus' unswerving loyalty  
and faithfulness to God during his suffering?*



Monday Holy Week

## LOVE IS STRONGER THAN DEATH

"Death is swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 15:55, 57)

Jesus' astonishing resurrection is essentially an event of love: the Father's love in handing over his Son for the salvation of the world; the Son's love in abandoning himself to the Father's will for us all; the Spirit's love in raising Jesus from the dead in his transfigured body. And there is more: the Father's love which "newly embraces" the Son, enfolding him in glory; the Son's love returning to the Father in the power of the Spirit, robed in our transfigured humanity. Jesus rises from the grave triumphant. Life is stronger than death. Good is stronger than evil. Love is stronger than hate. Truth is stronger than lies. With the resurrection, Christ draws all of us after him into the new light of the resurrection and he conquers all darkness. He is God's new day, new for all of us.

—*Pope Benedict XVI*

*What most intrigues me and inspires me about  
the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus?*

Tuesday Holy Week

## WILL YOU BETRAY ME?

“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 betrayal of Judas, who goes to the leaders of the Sanhedrin to bargain for and deliver his master to them. At that moment, a price was set on Jesus. As though he were an article for sale, his price is 30 pieces of silver. This tragic act marks the beginning of Christ’s passion, a sorrowful path which he chooses with absolute freedom. He himself says it clearly: “I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own. I have power to lay it down, and power to take it up again” (Jn 10:17-18). And thus by this betrayal Jesus’ journey of humiliation and suffering begins. Once Jesus has taken the path of humiliation and self-abandonment, he travels along it to the very end.

—Pope Francis

*In what ways and for what price have I most betrayed  
my calling to follow and imitate Jesus?*



Wednesday Holy Week

## THE GREATEST SACRAMENT OF OUR FAITH

“I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.”

(Jn 6:51)

The Eucharist is the greatest sacrament of our faith, and everything else is concentrated in it. Our Lord is present in it as son of God and son of Mary. He is present thanks to the power of the words he spoke and he is present under the species which he himself chose as the sign of his presence. We know that all this took place during the Last Supper when those species were quite naturally on the table to be shared between those who were eating with him. The words the apostles heard him say were completely new and full of deep significance. Speaking of the bread, Christ said: “This is my body which is given for you.” He then

took the cup of wine and said: “This is the cup of my blood which is shed for you” (Lk 22:19–20). This took place on Holy Thursday, but his words already referred to the events of Good Friday.

—Pope St. John Paul II

*How have I been most transformed by communion with Jesus body and blood?*



Holy Thursday

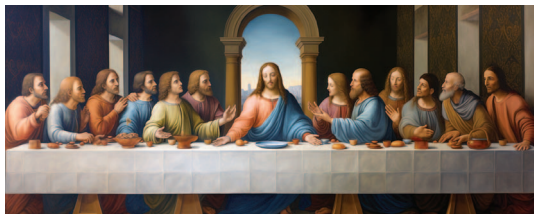
## WE BECOME THE BODY OF CHRIST

“The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ?  
The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?”  
(1 Corinthians 10:16)

What Jesus gave to us in the privacy of the upper room we express openly today, because the love of Christ is not reserved for a few but is destined for all. In the Eucharist the transformation of the gifts of this earth takes place—the bread and wine—whose aim is to transform our life and thereby to inaugurate the transformation of the world. The word “eucharist” (“thanksgiving”) expresses precisely this: that changing the substance of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ is the fruit of the gift that Christ made of himself, the gift of a love stronger than death, divine love which raised him from the dead. This transformation is possible thanks to a communion stronger than division, the communion of God himself. Whereas food for the body is assimilated by our organism and contributes to nourishing it, in the Eucharist it is not we who assimilate it but it assimilates us in itself, so that we become conformed to Jesus Christ, a member of his body, one with him.

—Pope Benedict XVI

*How have I experienced being one with Christ  
in the celebration of the eucharist?*





Good Friday

## JOINING OUR CROSSES TO THE CROSS OF CHRIST

“God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us.” (2 Corinthians 5:19-20)

Lord Jesus, help us to see in your cross all the crosses of the world: the cross of people hungry for bread and for love; the cross of people alone and abandoned even by their children and kin; the cross of people thirsty for justice and for peace; the cross of the elderly who struggle under the weight of years and of loneliness; the cross of migrants who find doors closed in fear and hearts armored by political calculations; the cross of families split by betrayal and selfishness; the cross of people who tirelessly seek to bring your light into the world and feel rejected, derided and humiliated; the cross of children who find themselves marginalized and rejected even by their families and their peers; the cross of our weaknesses, our hypocrisy, our betrayals, our sins and our many broken promises; the cross of our common earthly home that is gravely withering before our selfish eyes, blinded by greed and by power.

—Pope Francis

*How might I unite my cross with that of Jesus in my prayer today?*



Holy Saturday

## STRENGTHENED BY JESUS' CROSS

“We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life” (Romans 6:4).

Contemplating again today the cross of Christ, listening in silence to the word he addresses to you, discover this God who counts on you, who confides in you and never despairs of anyone. He offers you his strength in order to make fruitful the seeds of peace and reconciliation, which are in everyone's heart. The most humble acts of charity and fraternity witness to the presence of God. This evening, when we will gather together as members of the Church at the Easter Vigil, Jesus again invites you to be open to his loving gaze upon you, to receive the forgiveness that will give you the courage to start out again on the road

of life. He calls you to enter his light in order to continue on the path of conversion and reconciliation. Accept the love that transforms your lives and opens to you the horizons of truth and freedom.

—Pope St. John Paul II

*What do I most need to change in my behavior to grow  
in holiness now that Lent is ending?*



Easter Vigil

## CHRIST IS RISEN, ALLELUIA!

“Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you prepared in sight of all the peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel.” (Luke 2:29-32)

In the great Easter Vigil we relive the decisive and ever-present event of the resurrection, the central mystery of the Christian faith. The Paschal candle is lit to symbolize the light of Christ which has enlightened and continues to enlighten humanity, conquering the darkness of sin and death for ever. Let us allow the light that streams forth from this solemn night to enlighten us; let us open ourselves in sincere trust to the risen Christ, so that his victory over evil and death may also triumph in each one of us, in our families, in our cities and in our nations. May the light of Christ shine forth and bring consolation to those who live in the darkness of poverty, injustice and war and to the most vulnerable members of society. The risen Christ is with us until the end of time. In our hearts there is joy and sorrow, on our faces there are smiles and tears. Such is our earthly reality. But Christ is risen, he is alive! Let us walk with him in our wounded world.

—Pope Benedict XVI

*How will I best continue my journey of daily conversion  
now that Lent is ending?*



Easter Sunday

## CONTINUING OUR JOURNEY WITH THE RISEN CHRIST

“So, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, walk in him, rooted in him and built upon him and established in the faith as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.” (Colossians 2:6-7)

The women on that first Easter morning change from walking sorrowfully towards the tomb to running back with joy to the disciples to tell them not only that the Lord is risen, but also that they are to set out immediately to go to Galilee to meet the risen Lord. To go to Galilee means to return to the grace of the beginnings, where our love story with Jesus began, where the first encounter and call took place. It asks us to relive that moment, that situation, that experience in which we first met the Lord, experienced his love and received a new way of seeing ourselves, the world around us and the mystery of life itself. To rise again, to start anew, to take up the journey, we always need to return to Galilee. Remember your own Galilee and walk towards it, for it is the “place” where you came to know Jesus personally, where he stopped being just another personage from a distant past, but a living person who more than anyone else knows you and loves you.

—Pope Francis

*When and where did I first encounter the risen Christ  
and begin my personal relationship with him?*

