

Following Jesus



Daily Lenten Reflections by
**Pope Leo XIV, Pope Francis,
St. Mother Teresa & Henri Nouwen**

INTRODUCTION

Following Jesus' way of life is always a challenge. Lent offers us a sustained time for conversion by growing in our relationship to God through Jesus in the Holy Spirit. This growth only happens slowly, almost imperceptibly through God's power working in and through us every day. But this daily transformation always involves risk because if we are going to live the way Jesus wants us to, we might have to change who we are, the way we have learned to think and act from our family, our society, and even from the religious community we have grown up in. As Jesus warns us, following him means having to die to our self, our own "ego," our old vision of reality, our old values, and our old behaviors in order to be transformed into Christs. To see the world the way Jesus does, to value it as he does, and to act in it as he does will inevitably lead us to the cross just as it did Jesus. But like him, we must entrust ourselves to God and believe that through our cross will come the promised new life forever with God as it did for him. Death might end our earthly life, but it cannot end our relationship with God.

—Steve Mueller, Editor

Ash Wednesday

NOW IS THE TIME FOR CHANGE

"O that today you would listen to his voice, and harden not your hearts." (Psalm 95:7-8)

The Lenten season begins. It is a time to be with you Jesus, 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. There are no times or places without choices. And I know how deeply I resist choosing you. Please, Lord, 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. Amen. —*Henri J.M. Nouwen*



What might I most need to do to imitate Jesus and follow his ways this Lent?

Thursday after Ash Wednesday

LET US OPEN OURSELVES TO GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT

"Jesus came proclaiming the gospel of God: "Now is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Change your hearts and lives, and trust this good news!" (Mark 1:14:15)

God's Holy Spirit who descended upon Jesus is the quiet driving force of his mission (Luke 4:18). When we ask the Spirit to enlighten our minds, to multiply our languages, to awaken our senses, to instill love, to strengthen our bodies and to grant us peace, we become open to God's kingdom. This is, according to the Gospel, the meaning of conversion. It is a "turning toward" the kingdom already close at hand.

In Jesus we see, and from Jesus we hear, how everything changes because God is king, God is close to us. Let us become more deeply aware of this closeness of God, of his Spirit who joins our lives to that of Jesus. We are caught up in the new things that God brings about, so that his desire for the fullness of life will prevail over the power of death.

The Spirit of Jesus changes the world because he changes hearts. The Spirit

inspires the contemplative dimension of life that rejects self-assertion, complaining, rivalry and the temptation to control consciences and resources. The Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom (2 Corinthians 3:17). An authentic spirituality thus commits us to integral human development, to making Jesus' words a reality in our lives. When this happens, there is always joy: joy and hope. —*Pope Leo XIV*

What might I do to respond more fully to the Holy Spirit at work in me this Lent?

Friday after Ash Wednesday

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)

Lent is a time of renewal for the whole Church, for each community and every believer. With its invitations to conversion, Lent comes providentially to awaken us, to rouse us from torpor, from the risk of moving forward by inertia. 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 who is with us invites us to change our life. He, with the Holy Spirit, sows in us this restlessness to change our life and be a little better.

Let us accept Jesus' 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, and he will heal us and help us go forward. —*Pope Francis*

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

Saturday after Ash Wednesday

YOU BELONG TO JESUS

"You also are called to belong to Jesus Christ." (Romans 1:6)

Today God continues to call you and me, but do we listen? Have we heard his voice in the silence of our hearts? Do we make time to "be still and know that I am God"? For God cannot be heard in the midst of noise and the clamors of the world. Do we make time for prayer in our day? Do we love him enough to want to listen to his call to let go of everything and follow him?

God has chosen us, called us—each of us—by name. It is part of God's infinite mercy and plan that God has called us all together, each of us with our particular characters and faults. No matter who says what, nobody can change this for me. I belong to Jesus, who can do to me whatever he wants. The work we do is not our vocation. Our vocation is that we belong to him. Our profession is that we belong to him. Therefore, I am ready to do anything: wash, scrub, and so on. If I belong to Jesus, then I will do anything for Jesus. —*St. Mother Teresa*

How might I show my love for Christ better in my words and actions today?

First Sunday of Lent

BEING GOD'S BELOVED NEEDS NO PROOF

"And a voice came from the heavens, saying, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." (Matthew 3:17)

Jesus shows us the way of compassion, not only by what he says, but also by how he lives. Jesus speaks and lives as the Beloved Son of God, the words he heard from God the Father at his baptism. His immediate temptation then reveals the true identity of Jesus as God's beloved and this spiritual truth will guide all his thoughts, words, and actions. It is the rock on which his compassionate ministry will be built. The "Tempter" came to him asking him to prove that he was worth being loved. The "Tempter" said to him: "Do something useful, like turning stones into bread. Do something sensational, like throwing yourself down from a high tower. Do something that brings you power, like paying me homage."

These three temptations were three ways to seduce Jesus into becoming a competitor for love. The world of the "Tempter" is precisely that world in which people compete for love through doing useful, sensational, and powerful things and so winning medals that gain them affection and admiration. Jesus, however, is very clear in his response: "I don't have to prove that I am worthy of love. I am the Beloved of God, the One on whom God's favor rests." It was that victory over the "Tempter" that set Jesus free to choose for the compassionate life.

—*Henri J.M. Nouwen*

How does my being a beloved child of God most change my attitudes and actions?



Monday, Week 1

JESUS COMES TO DWELL WITH US

"Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them." (John 14:23)

In whatever the Lord calls us to do, in both our daily lives and our journey of faith, there are times when we feel inadequate. Yet Jesus tells us (John 14:23-29) not to rely on our own abilities but on the mercy of the God who has chosen us, and to be certain that the Holy Spirit guides us and teaches us all things. When God comes to dwell in us our life will become God's temple. God's love enlightens us, influences how we think and act, spreads outwards to others and embraces every situation in our lives. God's dwelling within us is precisely the gift of the Holy Spirit, who takes us by the hand and enables us to experience God's presence and closeness amid our daily lives, for God makes us his home.

So each of us can say: "Despite my weakness, the Lord is not ashamed of my humanity. Instead, God comes to dwell within me and accompanies me with his Spirit, enlightens me and makes me an instrument of his love for others, for society and for the world." So let us walk in the joy born of faith, in order to become God's holy temple. Let us resolve to bring God's love everywhere, never forgetting that each of our sisters and brothers is also a dwelling place of God.

—Pope Leo XIV

How does my being a dwelling place for God most change how I speak and act toward others?

Tuesday, Week 1

DISCOVERING JESUS THROUGH THE GOSPELS

"Hear the word that the LORD speaks to you, O house of Israel." (Jeremiah 10:1)

The Gospels allow you to know the real Jesus, the living Jesus. It speaks to your heart and changes your life. Read a passage of the Gospel every day and there you will find Jesus. In God's presence, during a recollected reading of the Gospel text, 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 the Lord, 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 set aside a regular time and place for praying with Scripture this Lent?

Wednesday, Week 1

JESUS WAITS IN SILENCE

"Be still and know that I am God... The LORD of hosts is with us." (Psalm 46:10, 11)

Jesus is always waiting for us in silence. In this silence he listens to us and speaks to our souls. And there, we hear his voice. Interior silence is very difficult, but we must make the effort to pray. In this silence we find a new energy and a real unity. God's energy becomes ours, allowing us to perform things well. There is unity of our thoughts with his thoughts, of our prayers with his prayers, of our actions with his actions, of our life with his life.

Are we convinced of Christ's love for us and of our love for him? This conviction is like the sun's rays, which cause the sap of life to flow and make the flowers of holiness blossom. This conviction is the rock on which holiness is built by serving Christ's poor and lavishing on them what we would love to do for him in person.

If we follow this way, our faith will grow, our conviction will grow, and the striving for holiness will become our daily task. God loves those to whom he can give the most, those who expect the most from him, who are most open to him, those who have most need of him and count on him for everything.

—*St. Mother Teresa*

How might I make a little more silent time this Lent for prayer and reflection?

Thursday, Week 1

THE ONE NECESSARY THING

"In Christ Jesus...the only thing that counts is faith working through love." (Galatians 5:6)

Jesus does not respond to our worry-filled way of living by saying that we should not be so busy with worldly affairs. He does not try to pull us away from the many events, activities and people that make up our lives. He does not tell us that what we do is unimportant, valueless or useless. Nor does he suggest that we should withdraw from our involvements and live quiet, restful lives removed from the struggles of the world.

Jesus' response to our worry-filled lives is quite different. He asks us to shift

the point of gravity, to relocate the center of our attention, to change our priorities. Jesus wants us to move from the “many things” to the “one necessary thing.” It is important for us to realize that Jesus in no way wants us to leave our many-faceted world. Rather, he wants us to live in it, but firmly rooted in the center of all things.

Jesus does not speak about a change of activities, a change in contacts, or a change of pace. He speaks about a change of heart. This change of heart makes everything different, even while everything appears to remain the same. To set our hearts on the kingdom therefore means to make the life of the Spirit within and among us the center of all we think, say, or do. —*Henri J.M. Nouwen*

What do I most need to do to center my daily life on Jesus and his way of living?

Friday, Week 1

PRAYING DAILY WITH GOD'S WORD

“Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock.” (Matthew 7:24)

Our relationship with God is the foundation for our actions. Although it is true that we must live out our faith through concrete actions, faithfully carrying out our duties according to our state of life and vocation, it is essential that we

do so only after meditating daily on the Word of God and listening to what the Holy Spirit is saying to our hearts. To this end, we should set aside moments of silence, moments of prayer, times in which, quieting noise and distractions, we recollect ourselves before God in simplicity of heart. This is a dimension of the Christian life that we particularly need to recover today, both as a value for individuals and communities,

and as a prophetic sign for our times. We must make room for silence, for listening to the Father who speaks and “sees in secret” (Matthew 6:6).

It is important to learn how to listen more, to enter into dialogue. First and foremost, with the Lord: always listen to the Word of God to see where the Lord is calling us. Then also listen to others, to know how to build bridges and to know how to listen without judging, not closing the doors thinking that we have all the truth and no one else can tell us anything. —*Pope Leo XIV*

How might I listen more attentively and respond to those who speak to me today?



Saturday, Week 1

LISTENING IN SILENCE

"Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening." (1 Samuel 3:9)

To understand what your own vocation is, I invite you to listen to and follow Jesus, and allow yourselves to be transformed interiorly by his words, which “are spirit and life” (John 6:62). 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, in communication, 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 cooperate with God in the service of the kingdom of mercy and truth, of justice and peace. —*Pope Francis*

How might I open myself even more to God in my prayer?

2nd Sunday of Lent

IN THE SILENCE, GOD SPEAKS

"For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from God." (Psalm 62:5)

To make possible true inner silence, practice silence of the eyes, by seeking always the beauty and goodness of God everywhere, and closing them to the faults of others and to all that is sinful and disturbing to the soul. Silence of the ears, by listening always to God’s voice and to the cry of the poor and the needy, and closing them to all other voices that come from fallen human nature, such as gossip, tale bearing, and uncharitable words.

Silence of the tongue, by praising God and speaking the life-giving Word of God that is the truth, that enlightens and inspires, brings peace, hope, and joy; and by refraining from self-defense and every word that causes darkness, turmoil, pain, and death. Silence of the mind, by opening it to the truth and knowledge of God in prayer and contemplation, like Mary who pondered the marvels of the Lord in her heart, and by closing it to all untruths, distractions, destructive thoughts, rash judgments, false suspicions of others, vengeful thoughts, and desires.

Silence of the heart, by loving God with our heart, soul, mind, and strength;

loving one another as God loves; and avoiding all selfishness, hatred, envy, jealousy, and greed. For in the silence and purity of the heart God speaks.

—St. Mother Teresa

What most hinders me from practicing true inner silence in my life now?

Monday, Week 2

CONFORMING OURSELVES TO CHRIST'S WAYS

"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)

Meditation is much more than thinking about the words of Scripture, much more than trying to understand the parables, or analyzing complicated sayings. It is the growing inner availability to the word so that the Word can guide us, open us, remove our fears, and come to dwell in us. True meditation is thus letting the Word become flesh in us.

The Holy Scriptures are the Word of God, which forms us into living Christs, and this formation goes far beyond information, instruction, edification or inspiration. This formation requires eating the Word, chewing on it, digesting it, and thus letting it become true nourishment. Thus the Word descends from our minds into our hearts and there finds a dwelling place.

This is what meditation is all about. It is the discipline of inner attentiveness to the Word. Among the many texts the church presents to us each year, there might be one word, one story, one parable, one sentence that has the power to turn us around, to change our whole life, to give us a new heart and new mind, to conform us to Christ. Reading the Word as a word of God for us is a sacramental event, an event by which the Word becomes present and transforms us into itself. —*Henri J.M. Nouwen*

Which scripture texts have been most important to me this Lent? Why?

Tuesday, Week 2

DO YOU WANT TO BE WELL?

"When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been ill for a long time, he said to him, 'Do you want to be well?'...Jesus said to him, 'Rise, take up your mat, and walk.'" (John 5:6, 8)

Think about the situations in which we feel “blocked” and stuck in a dead end. At times, in fact, it seems to be pointless to continue to hope. We become resigned and no longer have the desire to fight. The Gospels describe this situation with the image of paralysis.

When one such person was confronted by Jesus, he says that he has no one to immerse him in the healing pool. So he is not to blame, but the others who

do not take care of him are. This attitude becomes the pretext for avoiding responsibility. Then he adds that when he tries to immerse himself in the pool, there is always someone who arrives before him. He is expressing a fatalistic view of life thinking that things happen to us because we are not fortunate, because destiny is against us.

Instead, Jesus helps him to discover that his life is also in his hands. He invites him to get up, to raise himself up from his chronic situation, and to take his stretcher. His mat is not to be left or thrown away for it represents his past history of sickness. Until that moment, the past had blocked him and had forced him to lie like a dead man. Now it is he who can take that mat and carry it wherever he wishes: he can decide what to make of his history! It is a matter of walking, taking responsibility for choosing what road to take. And so it is for us! —*Pope Leo XIV*

What is most blocking me from drawing nearer to Jesus and his healing power?

Wednesday, Week 2

CENTERING MY LIFE ON CHRIST

*"To those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, grace to you and peace."
(1 Corinthians 1:2-3)*

In order to be saints, there is no need to be bishops, priests or religious. We are tempted to think that sainthood is reserved only to those who have the opportunity to break away from daily affairs in order to dedicate themselves exclusively to prayer. Rather we are all called to be saints by living with love and offering one's own Christian witness in everyday affairs. How have I responded up to now to the Lord's call to sanctity? Do I want to become a little better, a little more Christian? This is the path to holiness.

When the Lord invites us to become saints, he doesn't call us to something heavy or sad—quite the contrary! It's an invitation to share in his joy, to live and to offer with joy every moment of our life by making it become a gift of love for the people around us. If we understand this, everything changes and takes on new and beautiful meaning that begins with little everyday things. Every step towards sainthood makes us better people, free from being selfish and closed within ourselves, and opens us to our brothers and sisters and to their needs. Belonging to God comes about through a unique and personal relationship with Jesus. Every vocation, even within a variety of paths, requires centering one's life on Christ and on his gospel. —*Pope Francis*



How has my life become more centered on Christ during this Lenten season?

Thursday, Week 2

TO BE ALONE WITH GOD

"You have seen, O LORD; do not be silent! O Lord, do not be far from me!" (Psalm 35:22)

Prayer is a two-way process: speaking and listening. God speaks to us: we listen. We speak to God: God listens. God speaks in the silence of our heart, and we listen. And then we speak to God from the fullness of our heart, and God listens. Our words are useless unless they come from the bottom of our heart.



If we really want to pray, we must first learn to listen: for in the silence of the heart God speaks. Silence of the heart, not only of the mouth, is necessary. Our prayer life suffers so much because our hearts are not silent. The contemplatives and ascetics of all ages and religions have sought God in the silence and solitude of the desert, forest and mountain. We too are called to withdraw at certain intervals into deeper silence and aloneness with God, together as a community as well as personally.

To be alone with God, not with our books, thoughts, and memories but completely stripped of everything, to dwell lovingly in God's presence—silent, empty, expectant, and motionless. Listen in silence, because if your heart is full of other things you cannot hear the voice of God. But when you have listened to the voice of God in the stillness of your heart, then you can hear God everywhere. —*St. Mother Teresa*

What most frightens me about being silent and alone with God? Why?

Friday, Week 2

LISTEN TO MY VOICE!

"My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me." (John 10:27)

Prayer is the discipline of the moment. When we pray, we enter into the presence of God whose name is God-with-us. To pray is to listen attentively to the One who addresses us here and now. When we dare to trust that we are never alone but that God is always with us, always cares for us, and always speaks to us, then we can gradually detach ourselves from the voices that make us guilty or anxious and thus allow ourselves to dwell in the present moment.

This is a very hard challenge because radical trust in God is not obvious. Most of us distrust God. Most of us think of God as a fearful, punitive authority or as an empty, powerless nothing. Jesus' core message was that God is neither a powerless weakling nor a powerful boss, but a lover, whose only desire is to give us what our hearts most desire.

To pray is to listen to that voice of love. When we no longer pray, no longer listen to the voice of love that speaks to us in the moment, our lives become absurd lives in which we are thrown back and forth between the past and the future. If we could just be, for a few minutes each day, fully where we are, we would indeed discover that we are not alone and that the One who is with us wants only one thing: to give us love. —*Henri J.M. Nouwen*

How can I become more at ease with God in prayer?

Saturday, Week 2

IMITATING JESUS' WAY OF SERVING OTHERS

"Whoever wishes to be great...or to be first among you shall be your slave. Just so, the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."
(Matthew 20:26-28)

Each day take time to look into your own heart, to recognize that God is present and that, perhaps in many different ways, God is reaching out to you, calling you, inviting you to know his Son Jesus through the Scriptures, or perhaps through a friend or a relative or co-worker. We need to discover how important it is for us to pay attention to God's presence in our own hearts, to that longing for love in our lives, and then for searching and finding the ways that we may be able to do something with our own lives to serve others.

And in that service to others we may find that in coming together in friendship, in building up community, we too can find true meaning in our lives. So many people who suffer from different experiences of anxiety, loneliness, depression or sadness can discover that God's love is truly healing, that it brings hope, and that actually in coming together in community and living our faith together, we can find that God's love can truly heal us, give us the strength that we need, and be the source of the hope that we all need in our lives. To share that message of hope with one another as Jesus did—in outreach, in service, in looking for ways to make our world a better place—gives true life to all of us, and is a sign of hope for the whole world. —*Pope Leo XIV*

How have I most experienced God reaching out to me to know Jesus better this Lent?

3rd Sunday of Lent

LET GOD'S GRACE TRANSFORM YOU

"Be transformed, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." (Matthew 3:2)

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.

We believe that all those who entrust themselves to God in love will bear good fruit though this fruitfulness is often invisible, elusive and unquantifiable. We trust that our lives will be fruitful, without claiming to know how, where or when. We believe that none of our acts of love will be lost, nor any of our acts of sincere concern for others, that no generous effort is meaningless, no painful endurance is wasted. —*Pope Francis*

How have I most experienced the process of conversion progressing in me this Lent?

Monday, Week 3

WE NEED EYES OF DEEP FAITH TO SEE CHRIST

"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)

The first step toward holiness is the will to become holy. Through a firm and upright will we love God, we choose God, we hasten to God, we reach him, we have him. Often, under the pretext of humility, of trust, of abandonment, we can forget to use the strength of our will. Everything depends on these words, "I will" or "I will not." And into the expression "I will" I must put all my energy. One cannot expect to become a saint without paying the price, and the price is much renunciation, temptation, struggle and persecution, and all sorts of sacrifices. One cannot love God except at the cost of oneself.

We need the eyes of deep faith to see Christ in the broken body and dirty clothes under which the most beautiful One hides. We shall need the hand of Christ to touch those bodies wounded by pain and suffering. How pure our hands must be if we have to touch Christ's body as the priest touches him in the appearances of bread at the altar. With what love and devotion and faith he lifts the sacred host! These same feelings we too must have when we lift the body of the sick and poor. —*St. Mother Teresa*

What has most helped me discover God's hidden presence in those around me this Lent?

Tuesday, Week 3

PRAYING IN THE SPIRIT OF JESUS

"The spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life." (Job 33:4)

In Jesus Christ, God has entered into our lives in the most intimate way, so that we could enter into his life through the Spirit. In Jesus, God became one of us to lead us through Jesus into the intimacy of his divine life. Jesus came to us to become as we are and left us to allow us to become as he is. By giving us his Spirit, his breath, he became closer to us than we are to ourselves. It is through this breath of God that we can call God "Abba, Father" and can become part of the mysterious divine relationship between Father and Son. Praying in the Spirit of Jesus Christ, therefore, means participating in the intimate life of God himself.

There is probably no image that expresses so well the intimacy with God in prayer as the image of God's breath. We are like asthmatic people who are cured of their anxiety. The Spirit has taken away our narrowness (the Latin word for *anxiety* is *angustia* = narrowness) and made everything new for us. We receive a new breath, a new freedom, a new life. This new life is the divine life of God himself. Prayer, therefore, is God's breathing in us, by which we become part of the intimacy of God's inner life, and by which we are born anew. —*Henri J.M. Nouwen*



How has God's new life in me most revealed itself this Lent?

Wednesday, Week 3

WHO SHALL WE TURN TOO?

"There is no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved." (Acts 4:12)

When we are affected by suffering, illness or disability, failure, the loss of a loved one and our hearts feel sadness and anguish. We wonder who will come to our aid? Who will have pity on us? Who will come to save us? Not only from our sufferings, from our limits and our mistakes, but even from death itself? The answer is that only Jesus comes to save us, no one else. Only Jesus has the power to do so because he is God almighty in person and because he loves us.

The sure proof that Jesus loves us and saves us is that he gave his life for us, offering it on the cross. Indeed, there is no greater love than to lay down one's life for those one loves (John 15:13). The most wonderful thing about our faith that no one could have imagined or hoped for is that God, the creator of

heaven and earth, wanted to suffer and die for us creatures. God loved us to the point of dying for us! To do so, God descended from heaven, humbled himself by becoming human, and offered himself as a sacrifice on the cross, the most important event in the history of the world. What should we fear from a God who loved us up to this point? What more could we hope for? —*Pope Leo XIV*

How has Jesus been most helpful as a remedy for what most burdens me?

Thursday, Week 3

DOING ALL I CAN

"Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." (Matthew 25:40)

Lent offers us a chance to reawaken our conscience, too often grown dull in the face of poverty. We cannot escape the Lord's words to us at the heart of Jesus' teaching where the poor have a special experience of God's mercy. In his teaching, Jesus introduces us to these works of mercy, which will serve as the criteria upon which we will be judged: whether we have fed the hungry and given drink to the thirsty, welcomed the stranger and clothed the naked, or spent time with the sick and those in prison (Matthew 25:31-45).

Moreover, we will be asked if we have helped others to escape the doubt that causes them to fall into despair and which is often a source of loneliness; if we have helped to overcome the ignorance in which millions of people live, especially children deprived of the necessary means to free them from the bonds of poverty; if we have been close to the lonely and afflicted; if we have forgiven those who have offended us and have rejected all forms of anger and hate that lead to violence; if we have had the kind of patience God shows, who is so patient with us; and if we have commended our brothers and sisters to the Lord in prayer. —*Pope Francis*

How I can discover practical ways to make the lives of those around me better today?

Friday, Week 3

LIVING THE LOVE OF GOD

"If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." (Matthew 19:21)

There are many kinds of poverty. Even in countries where the economic situation seems to be a good one, there are expressions of poverty hidden in a deep place, such as the tremendous loneliness of people who have been abandoned and who are suffering. As far as I am concerned, the greatest suffering is to feel

alone, unwanted, unloved. The greatest suffering is also having no one, forgetting what an intimate, truly human relationship is, not knowing what it means to be loved, not having a family or friends.

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*

How might I be more alert to those around me who need my help today?

Saturday, Week 3

BECOME A LIVING CHRIST

"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me."
(Galatians 2:19-20)

The spiritual life is a life guided by the same Spirit who guided Jesus Christ. The Spirit is the breath of Christ in us, the divine power of Christ active in us, the mysterious source of new vitality by which we are made aware that it is not we who live, but Christ who lives in us.

Indeed, to live a spiritual life means to become living Christs. It is not enough to try to imitate Christ as much as possible, to remind others of Jesus, to be inspired by the words and actions of Jesus. No, the spiritual life presents us with a far more radical demand: to be living Christs here and now, in time and history. We will never come to know our true vocation in life unless we are willing to grapple with the radical claim the gospel places on us.



Regardless of the particular shape we give to our lives, Jesus' call to discipleship is primal, all-encompassing, all-inclusive, demanding a total commitment. One cannot be a little bit for Christ, give him some attention, or make him one of many concerns. Is it possible to follow Christ while fulfilling the demands of the world, to listen to Christ while paying equal attention to others, to carry Christ's cross while carrying many other burdens as well? —*Henri J.M. Nouwen*

How might I commit myself more fully to carry on Christ's work in my daily life?

GROWING IN JOY

"Rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed." (1 Peter 4:13)

Joy is not simply a matter of temperament. In the service of God and others, it is always hard to be joyful—all the more reason why we should try to acquire it and make it grow in our hearts.

Joy is prayer; joy is strength; joy is love; joy is a net of love by which we catch others. God loves a cheerful giver. She gives most who gives with joy. If in



your work you have difficulties and you accept them with joy, with a big smile—in this, like in any other thing—people will see your good works and glorify the Father. The best way to show your gratitude is to accept everything with joy. A joyful heart is the normal result of a heart burning with love.

We need to find God, who 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*

How might I increase and share my joy by imitating Jesus' loving service of others?

Monday, Week 4

A TIME TO WITNESS

"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

With what spirit must disciples of Jesus now carry out his mission? First of all they must be aware of the difficult and sometimes hostile reality that awaits them. Hostility is always at the beginning of persecutions of Christians because Jesus knows that the mission is blocked by the work of evil. So the disciple will strive to be free from every kind of human conditioning so as to place reliance solely in the power of the cross of Jesus Christ.

This means abandoning every motive of personal advantage, careerism or hunger for power and humbly making ourselves instruments of the salvation carried out by Jesus' sacrifice. A Christian's mission of service in the world is intended for everyone and excludes no one. It requires a great deal of generosity

and above all setting one's gaze and heart on God, to invoke the Lord's help. There is a great need for Christians who joyfully witness to the Gospel in everyday life. Listen to the Lord's call to follow him. Fear not! Be courageous and bring to others God's good news. —*Pope Francis*

With whom might I share my understanding of God's Good News of salvation today?

Tuesday, Week 4

IMITATING JESUS' WAY OF SEEING

"Jesus had compassion on the two blind men and touched their eyes. Immediately they were able to see, and they followed him." (Matthew 20:34)

We must consider God's way of seeing us, so that we in turn can learn how to see situations and people with his eyes, so full of love and compassion. God has looked upon us with compassion and wanted to walk our same path and come down among us. In Jesus, God came to heal our wounds and to pour out upon us the balm of his love and mercy. If Christ shows us the face of a compassionate God, then to believe in him and to be his disciples means allowing ourselves to be changed and to take on his same feelings. It means learning to have a heart that is moved, eyes that see and do not look away, hands that help others and soothe their wounds, shoulders that bear the burden of those in need.

How we look at others is what counts, because it shows what is in our hearts. We can look and walk by, or we can look and be moved with compassion. There is a kind of seeing that is superficial, distracted and hasty, a way of seeing while pretending not to see. We can see without being touched or challenged by the sight. Then too, there is seeing with the eyes of the heart, looking more closely, empathizing with the other, sharing his or her experience, letting ourselves be touched and challenged. This way of seeing calls into question the way we live our life and the responsibility we feel towards others. —*Pope Leo XIV*

How would I describe my personal encounter with Jesus and how that most changed my life?

Wednesday, Week 4

MEETING JESUS IN OUR HEART

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." (Luke 10:27)

The mystery of the spiritual life is that Jesus desires to meet us in the deepest recesses of our own being, the seclusion of our own heart, to make his love known to us there. In the privacy of our heart we can learn not only to know Jesus but, through Jesus, ourselves as well. God wants to be together with us

where we really live and, by loving us there, to show us the way to be a complete human being. Each time you let God's love penetrate deeper into your heart, you lose a bit of your anxiety, and when you shed a bit of your anxiety, you learn to know yourself better and long all the more to be known by your loving God.

Thus, the more you learn to love God, the more you learn to know and to cherish yourself. Self-knowledge and self-love are the fruit of knowing and loving God. Laying our hearts totally open to God leads to a love of ourselves that enables us to give whole-hearted love to our fellow human beings. In the seclusion of our hearts we learn to know the hidden presence of God; and with that spiritual knowledge we can lead a loving life. Everyone who has let God's love enter into his or her heart has not only become a better human being, but has also contributed significantly to making a better world. —*Henri J.M. Nouwen*

How have I most experienced Jesus' presence in myself and my life? With what results?

Thursday, Week 4

A TIME TO BE FORGIVEN

"We had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found." (Luke 15:32)

Jesus' parable of the prodigal son and the loving father presents the true face of God, who with open arms deals with sinners with tenderness and compassion. The parable manifests the infinite love of God who enfolds in a close embrace the son who has been found. The path to return home is the path of hope and new life.

Like the father, God is always awaiting us with patience, seeing us when we are still a long way off, running to meet us, embracing us, kissing us, forgiving us. God's forgiveness cancels the past and regenerates us in love. When God embraces us, God forgives us and forgets the past. When we convert and let ourselves be re-encountered by God, reproach and sternness do not await us, because God saves and welcomes us home again with joy and prepares a feast. This fills us with a great hope because there is no sin into which we may have fallen, from which, with the grace of God, we cannot rise up again. No one is irrecoverable because God never stops wanting our good—even when we sin! —*Pope Francis*

When have I most experienced God's forgiveness and loving mercy? With what results?



Friday, Week 4

SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL FOR GOD

"How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? Let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action."
(1 John 3:17-18)

Prayer in action is love, and love in action is service. Try to give unconditionally whatever a person needs in the moment. The point is to do something, however small, and show you care through your actions by giving your time. Sometimes this may mean doing something physical (as we do in our homes for the sick and dying) or sometimes it may mean offering spiritual support for the shut-ins (those isolated and lonely in their own homes).

Our work is constant. The problems of the poor continue, so our work continues. We can do something beautiful for God by reaching out to the poor. I see no lack of hesitation in helping others. I see only people filled with God's love, wanting to do works of love. This is the future—this is God's wish for us—to serve through love in action, and to be inspired by the Holy Spirit to act when called.

It is not how much you do but how much love you put into the doing and sharing with others that is important. Try not to judge people. If you judge others then you are not giving love. Instead try to help them by seeing their needs and acting to meet them. It isn't what anyone may or may not have done, but what you have done that matters in God's eyes. —*St. Mother Teresa*

How might I best put my prayer into practical action and service of others today?

Saturday, Week 4

CRY OUT TO THE LORD IN CONFIDENCE

"In my distress I called out: LORD! I cried out to my God. From his temple he heard my voice; my cry to him reached his ears." (Psalm 18:7)

We usually think of crying out as something disorderly, to be repressed. But Scripture confers an immense value to our cry, reminding us that it can be an invocation, a protest, a desire, a surrender. It can even be the extreme form of prayer, when there are no words left, as in Jesus' cries on the cross (Matthew 27:46-50).

One cries out when one believes that someone can still hear. One cries not out of desperation, but out of desire. To cry out therefore becomes a spiritual gesture. It is not only the first act of our birth, when we come into the world crying: it is also a way of staying alive. One cries when one suffers, but also when one loves, one calls, one invokes. To cry out is saying who we are, that we do not

want to fade away in silence, that we still have something to offer.

In the journey of life, there are moments in which keeping something inside can slowly consume us. Jesus teaches us not to be afraid to cry out, as long as it is sincere, humble, addressed to God who hears. A cry is never pointless, if it is born of love. And it is never ignored, if it is delivered to God. It is a way to not give in to cynicism, to continue to believe that another world is possible.

—Pope Leo XIV

What do I most want to cry out to God about in my prayer today?

5th Sunday of Lent

GOD IS AT WORK IN US

“Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.” (Psalm 22:11)

Have you ever tried to spend a whole hour doing nothing but listening to the voice that dwells deep in your heart? When there is no radio to listen to, no TV to watch, no book to read, no person to talk to, no project to finish, no phone call to make, how does that make you feel?

Often you will feel that nothing happens in your prayer. You say: “I am just sitting there and getting distracted.” But if you develop the discipline of spending one half hour a day listening to the voice of love, you will gradually discover that something is happening of which you were not even conscious.

It might be only in retrospect that you discover the voice that blesses you. You thought that what happened during your time of listening was nothing more than a lot of confusion, but then you discover yourself looking forward to your quiet time and missing it when you can’t have it.

The movement of God’s Spirit is very gentle, very soft—and hidden. It does not seek attention. But that movement is also very persistent, strong and deep. It changes our hearts radically. The faithful discipline of prayer reveals to you that you are the blessed one and gives you the power to bless others.

—Henri J.M. Nouwen

What might I do to listen more closely to God’s voice and not distracting ones?

Monday, Week 5

DEEPENING OUR FRIENDSHIP WITH CHRIST

“I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father.” (John 15:15)

Friendship is so important that Jesus calls himself a friend. By the gift of his grace, we are elevated in such a way that we truly become his friends. With the

same love that Christ pours out on us, we can love him in turn and share his love with others, in the hope that they too will take their place in the community of friendship he established and work generously to help him build his kingdom in this world, by bringing his message, his light, and above all his love, to others.

Friendship with Jesus cannot be broken. He never leaves us, even though at times it appears that he keeps silent. With a friend, we can speak and share our deepest secrets. With Jesus too, we can always have a conversation. Prayer is both a challenge and an adventure. And what an adventure it is! Gradually Jesus makes us appreciate his grandeur and draw nearer to him. Prayer enables us to share with him every aspect of our lives and to rest confidently in his embrace. At the same time, it gives us a share in his own life and love. When we pray, we open everything we do to him. In this way, we can experience a constant closeness to him, greater than anything we can experience with another person.

—*St. Mother Teresa*

What changes most in me and my behavior because Jesus' calls me his friend?

Tuesday, Week 5

TAKE TIME TO TALK TO JESUS

"Were not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:32)

Often when facing a difficult situation or a burden of life, we try to talk about it with someone who listens to us, with a friend, with an expert. This is a great thing to do, but let us not forget Jesus. Let us not forget to open ourselves to him and to recount our life to him, to entrust people and situations to him. He always awaits us not to magically resolve problems, but to strengthen us amid our problems. Jesus does not lift the burdens from our life, but the anguish from our heart. He does not take away our cross, but carries it with us. And with him every burden becomes light because he is the comfort we seek. When Jesus enters life, peace arrives, the kind that remains even in trials, in suffering.

Let us go to Jesus. Let us give him our time. Let us encounter him each day in prayer, in a trusting and personal dialogue. Let us become familiar with his Word. Let us fearlessly rediscover his forgiveness. We will feel loved and feel comforted by him. Let us welcome him and express our joy at accompanying him, at knowing him to be close, present in us and among us as a friend, a brother. Let us follow Jesus daily on his way! —*Pope Francis*



When have I most enjoyed sharing my inmost thoughts with Jesus?

Wednesday, Week 5

THE MYSTERY OF OUR SALVATION

"People should think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries."
(1 Corinthians 4:1)

The entire mystery of the Lord's incarnation, death and resurrection is entrusted in a special way to us, so that we can make it present in our world. The love of God has no limits. We are called to let ourselves be embraced and shaped by that love, and to realize that in God's eyes—and our own as well—there is no place for division and hatred of any kind. Our hope is grounded in the knowledge that the Lord never abandons us but is always at our side.



At the same time, we are called to cooperate with him, above all by putting the Eucharist at the center of our lives. We are called to foster in our hearts the desire that everyone may come to know Christ and have eternal life in him. We are called to deepen our closeness to Jesus and to be a source of harmony by bearing on our shoulders those who are lost, granting forgiveness to those who have erred, seeking out those who have gone astray or been left behind, and caring for those who suffer in body or spirit. And to do all this in a great exchange of love that, flowing from the pierced side of the crucified Lord, embraces all people and fills the entire world. —Pope Leo XIV

How might I better share God's love in a practical way with others today?

Thursday, Week 5

BEING USELESS IN 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)

When we enter into solitude we will often hear the voice of the world and the voice of the Lord pulling us in two contrary directions. But if we keep returning faithfully to the place of solitude, the Lord's voice will gradually become stronger and we will come to know and understand with mind and heart the peace we are searching for.

What do we do in our solitude? The first answer is nothing. Just be present to the One who wants your attention and listen! It is precisely in this "useless" presence to God that we can gradually die to our illusions of power and control and give ear to the voice of love hidden in the center of our being. But "doing nothing, being useless," is not as passive as it sounds. In fact it requires effort

and great attentiveness. It calls us to an active listening in which we make ourselves available to God's healing presence and can be made new.

The way to develop this attentive listening will vary with different people, but it always includes some type of meditation on scripture. By quietly reading the psalms, reflecting on a scripture passage, or simply repeating a short prayer, we will find that the restless voices of our demanding world lose some of their power. We will feel more and more that solitude offers us a home where we can listen to our Lord, where we can find the strength to be obedient to God's Word, and in which we can act freely and courageously. —*Henri J.M. Nouwen*

How might I embrace "doing nothing, being useless" in my prayer times?

Friday, Week 5

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 yet 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 us. 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*

How might I give myself more completely to God and God's service?

Saturday, Week 5

A TIME TO LOOK TO THE CROSS

"Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." (John 12:24)

Jesus brought new hope into the world in the manner of a seed. He became very small, like a grain of wheat. He left his heavenly glory to come among us and "fell into the earth." But this still was not enough. To bear fruit, Jesus experienced love to the fullest, allowing himself to be split open by death as a seed lets itself split open under the ground. Precisely there, at the lowest point of his

abasement—which is also the loftiest point of love—hope sprang up.

Hope is born from the cross. So look to the cross, look to Christ crucified and from there you will receive the hope that never disappears, which lasts to eternal life. The love that is the life of God has renewed everything that it touched. With Jesus, all our darkness can be transformed into light, every defeat into victory, every disappointment into hope. Hope overcomes all, because it is born of the love of Jesus who made himself as a grain of wheat that fell to the soil and died to give life, and hope comes from that life full of love.

—Pope Francis

What gives me the most hope when I contemplate Christ crucified and risen?

Passion/Palm Sunday of Lent

THE PARADOX OF HOLY WEEK

“Christ [is] the power of God and the wisdom of God. The foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.” (1 Corinthians 1:25)

Today and all this week, we dwell on the account of Jesus’ passion, death and resurrection—the most luminous and at the same time darkest moments of his life. This reveals the Christian paradox: God saves not by defeating evil with force, but by accepting the weakness of love to the very end. On the cross, Jesus does not realize himself in power, but in trustful openness to others, even when they are hostile and enemies. Christ, By his death and resurrection, has himself become “our hope” (1 Timothy 1:1).

A man in a blue suit is kneeling in prayer at a small altar. On the altar is a single lit candle. The background is a simple, light-colored wall.

Amid life’s trials, our hope is inspired by the firm and reassuring certainty of God’s love, poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. That hope does not disappoint (Romans 5:5) for by recognizing that God is our first and only hope, we too pass from fleeting hopes to a lasting hope. Ultimately, this is hope: knowing that even if we fail, God will never fail us. Even if we betray him, God never stops loving us. And if we allow ourselves to be touched by this love—humble, wounded, but always faithful—then we can truly be reborn. And we can begin to live as God’s children who are always loved. —Pope Leo XIV

When have I most experienced surprising strength in my times of weakness?

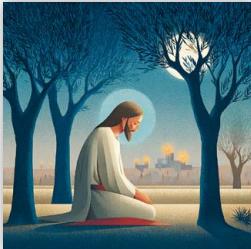
Monday Holy Week

DISCIPLE OR EXECUTIONER? YOU CHOOSE!

"Pilate said to the crowd, 'Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?' All of them said, 'Let him be crucified!'" (Matthew 27:22)

Passion is a kind of waiting—waiting for what other people are going to do. Jesus went to Jerusalem to announce the good news and put a choice before them: Will you be my disciple or my executioner? There is no middle ground here. This is the great drama of Jesus' passion: he had to wait for their response. What would they do? Betray him or follow him?

In a way, his agony is not simply the agony of approaching death. It is also the agony of being out of control and of having to wait. It is the agony of a God who depends on us to decide how to live out the divine presence among us. It is the agony of the God who, in a very mysterious way, allows us to decide how God will be God. Here we glimpse the mystery of God's incarnation. God became human not only to act among us but also to be the recipient of our responses. His vocation as a human being would be fulfilled not just in his actions but also in his passion. And we begin to understand that precisely in this waiting some new hope, new peace, and even new joy were gradually emerging. —*Henri J.M. Nouwen*



How might I more fully follow Jesus and not betray his ways, especially in little things?

Tuesday Holy Week

JESUS, I AM HERE, LOVE ME

"As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love." (John 15:9)

In the Gospel there are those few little words to describe Jesus' passion and death: he was crowned, scourged, spat upon. The Gospels avoid great description and are very short in their explanation of the passion. Jesus has died on the cross because he loved.

Jesus understood our human nature. He understood that far from the eyes is also far from the heart. Just imagine what our lives would be without him. Today let us not read much, or even meditate much, but just allow Jesus to love us. Try to keep still for a moment and let yourself feel his love. Try to silence all the noise within, and rest for a second in his loving embrace.

We always want to say, "Jesus, I love you," but we don't allow Jesus to love us. Today say often, "Jesus I am here, love me." When we look at the cross we know how much he loved us; when we look at the tabernacle, we know how

much he loves us now. Not “loved,” past tense; but present tense “loves.” He loves us now. He loves us tenderly. Never doubt this, whatever may happen to you in life, at every moment you are infinitely loved. —*St. Mother Teresa*

How might I take time today just to experience Jesus’ personal love for me?

Wednesday Holy Week

A TIME TO DIE TO SELF

“Those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it.” (Luke 9:24)

When we lose our lives for love of Jesus, we live no longer for ourselves, for our own interests and “image,” but in the image of Christ, for him and following him, with his love and in his love. This is an invitation not to be caught up with the prospects and fashions of the moment, but rather to constantly look to the Lord’s cross to discover our program of life. It is an invitation to overcome all those temptations to self-absorption that prevent us from perceiving how the Holy Spirit is at work outside our familiar surroundings.

If we experience this dying to ourselves for Jesus’ sake, our old way of life will be a thing of the past and we will pass over to a new form of life and fellowship. To look back is helpful, but to be fixated on the past, lingering over the memory of wrongs done and endured, and judging in merely human terms, can paralyze us and prevent us from living in the present. God’s Word encourages us to draw strength from memory and to recall the good things the Lord has given us. But it also asks us to leave the past behind in order to follow Jesus today and to live a new life in him. —*Pope Francis*

What most scares me about Jesus’ challenge to die to myself and my own interests?

Holy Thursday

JESUS GIVES HIMSELF AS THE BREAD OF LIFE

“I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst.” (John 6:35)

Christ is God’s answer to our human hunger, because his body is the bread of eternal life: Take this and eat of it, all of you! Jesus’ invitation reflects our daily experience: in order to remain alive, we need to nourish ourselves with life, drawing it from plants and animals. Yet eating something dead reminds us that we too, no matter how much we eat, will one day die. But when we partake of Jesus, the living and true bread, we live for him. By offering himself completely, the crucified and risen Lord delivers himself into our hands, and we realize that

we were made to partake of God.

What happens between us and God through the Eucharist is that the Lord welcomes, sanctifies and blesses the bread and wine that we place on the altar, together with the offering of our lives, and he transforms them into the body and blood of Christ, the sacrifice of love for the salvation of the world. God unites himself to us by joyfully accepting what we bring, and invites us to unite ourselves to him by likewise joyfully receiving and sharing his gift of love. Jesus calls each of us to sit at his table. Blessed are those who are called, for they become witnesses of this love! —*Pope Leo XIV*

How have I most experienced the nourishing power of the Eucharist in myself and my life?

Good Friday

THROUGH DEATH TO VICTORY

"Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." (John 12:24)

When he was dying on the cross, Jesus was ultimately vulnerable. He had nothing left. Everything had been taken from him, including his dignity, and in the eyes of his culture he was a failure. But in all truth the moment of his death on the cross was his life's greatest moment, because there his life became the most fruitful one in all history. Jesus saw his life and his death as fruitful. "It is good for you that I go. I will send you my Spirit."

Our weakness and old age call people to surround us and support us. By not resisting weakness and by gratefully receiving another's care we call forth community and provide our caregivers an opportunity to give their own gifts of compassion, care, love, and service. As we are given into their hands, others are blessed and enriched by caring for us. Our weakness bears fruit in their lives. And dying is our ultimate vulnerability. Instead of looking at the weakness of old age as simply the experience of loss after loss, we can choose it as a passage to emptiness where our hearts have room to be filled with the Spirit of Love overflowing. It is ultimate weakness, but it is also potentially the greatest moment of our fruitfulness. —*Henri J.M. Nouwen*



What must I most do to die to my sinfulness to live fully for Christ and for others?

Holy Saturday

NO TOMB COULD HOLD HIM!

"O truly blessed Night, which alone deserved to know the time and the hour when Christ rose from the realm of the dead!" (The Exsultet song of the Easter Vigil Liturgy)

Christ is alive! We need to keep reminding ourselves of this, because we can risk seeing Jesus Christ simply as a fine model from the distant past, as a memory, as someone who saved us two thousand years ago. But that would be of no use to us: it would leave us unchanged and would not set us free. The one who fills us with his grace, the one who liberates us, transforms us, heals and consoles us is someone fully alive. He is the Christ, risen from the dead, filled with supernatural life and energy, and robed in boundless light. That is why Saint Paul could say: "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile" (1 Corinthians 15:7).



Alive, he can be present in your life at every moment, to fill it with light and to take away all sorrow and solitude. Even if all others depart, he will remain, as he promised: "I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). He fills your life with his unseen presence; wherever you go, he will be waiting there for you. Because he did not only come in the past but he comes to you today and every day, inviting you to set on the way towards ever new horizons. —*St. Mother Teresa*

Where and when have I most experienced the risen Christ in myself and my life?

Easter Sunday

PEACE BE WITH YOU ALL!

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid." (John 14:27)

These are the first words spoken by the risen Christ, the Good Shepherd who laid down his life for God's flock. I would like this greeting of peace to resound in your hearts, in your families, among all people, wherever they may be, in every nation and throughout the world. It is the peace of the risen Christ. A peace that is unarmed and disarming, humble and persevering. A peace that comes from God, the God who loves us all, unconditionally. Allow me to extend that same blessing to the world, the whole world: Peace be with you!

God loves us, God loves you all, and evil will not prevail! All of us are in God's hands. So, let us move forward, without fear, together, hand in hand with God and with one another other ever pursuing peace and justice, ever seeking to act as men and women faithful to Jesus Christ, in order to proclaim the Gospel

without fear, to be missionaries. We are followers of Christ. Christ goes before us. The world needs his light. Humanity needs him as the bridge that can lead us to God and his love. Help us, one and all, to build bridges through dialogue and encounter, joining together as one people, always at peace. Happy Easter to All! —*Pope Leo XIV*

How might I best share the joy and peace of Easter with others today?



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A LENTEN PRAYER

O Lord, I enter into this holy season of Lent with fear, but also with great expectations. I hope for a great breakthrough, a powerful conversion, a real change of heart. I want 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 come to your people with thunder and lightning. Even St. Paul and St. Francis journeyed through much darkness before they could see your light. Let me be thankful for your gentle way. I know you are at work. I know you will not leave me alone. I know you are quickening me for Easter but in a way fitting to my own history and temperament. I pray that as you invite me to enter more fully into the mystery of your passion, you 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. Let me die to the desire to choose my own way and select my own cross. You do not want to make me a hero but a servant who loves you. Be with me tomorrow and in the days to come, and let me experience your gentle presence. *Amen.*

—*Henri J.M. Nouwen*

Jesus, be my daily companion on my Lenten journey.

