

# **LENT HOLY WEEK & EASTER**

**A Season of Cleansing and Renewal  
for Catholic Christians**

**Father James Chelich**

**Copyright: James Chelich – April 2014**

**Revised: March 2017**

**Revised: April 2018**

**Unless otherwise noted, all Bible passages are from the New American Bible  
with Revised Psalms and New Testament, copyright DeVore and Sons, Inc., 1987  
Occasionally: New American Bible, copyright Catholic Publishers, Inc., 1970**

## **CONTENTS**

### **LENT**

<b>I</b>	<b>The Biblical Inspiration of Lent</b>	<b>Page 2</b>
<b>II</b>	<b>Lent Begins on Ash Wednesday</b>	<b>Page 3</b>
<b>III</b>	<b>Beginning Where Jesus Began</b>	<b>Page 5</b>
<b>IV</b>	<b>A Time for Self-Examination</b>	<b>Page 6</b>
<b>V</b>	<b>Healing Exercises for the Season of Lent</b>	<b>Page 9</b>
<b>VI</b>	<b>Lent and the Landscape of Human Relationship</b>	<b>Page 11</b>
<b>VII</b>	<b>Tracing a Spiritual Path Through the Weeks of Lent</b>	<b>Page 15</b>

### **EASTER**

**Page 20**

### **THE EASTER SEASON**

**Page 22**

## **I THE BIBLICAL INSPIRATION OF LENT**

*After Jesus was baptized, he came up from the water and behold, the heavens were opened [for him], and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove [and] coming upon him. And a voice came from the heavens, saying, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was hungry. The tempter approached and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become loaves of bread." He said in reply, "It is written 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God.'"* Then the devil took him to the holy city, and made him stand on the parapet of the temple, and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you' and 'with their hands they will support you, lest you dash your foot against a stone.' Jesus answered him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.'" Then the devil took him up to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in their magnificence, and he said to him, "All these I shall give to you, if you will prostrate yourself and worship me." At this, Jesus said to him, "Get away, Satan! It is written: 'The Lord, your God, shall you worship and him alone shall you serve.'" Then the devil left him and, behold, angels came and ministered to him.

*Matthew 3:16 to 4:11*

### **The Church's Liturgical Year**

Under the inspiration and guidance of the Spirit of God, the Catholic Church has over the centuries arranged its pattern of reading and reflection on the Sacred Scriptures into an annual cycle. Each year contains a complete meditation on the coming (Advent), birth (Christmas), ministry and teaching (Ordinary Time), passion and death (Holy Week), resurrection (Easter) and manifestation of the presence and power (Pentecost) of Jesus the Messiah and Savior.

The four Gospels, which record these events in Jesus' life, are read against the backdrop of the Torah (the first five Books of the Old Testament) which record the commandments of God, and the Books of the Prophets which record the promises made by God for the redemption, healing, and regeneration of the life of man and woman and their world.

### **Lent**

Lent is a six week period the Church places before the annual celebration of Jesus' passion, death and resurrection (Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday/Easter Sunday). This period of time is intentionally meant to correspond to the forty days Jesus spent in the wilderness after his Baptism. Inspired by Jesus forty-day retreat to the

desert to fast, pray and to be tested, the Church established a season during which it calls its members to fasting, prayer and a serious examination of the quality of their Christian life and discipleship. The Word of God says:

*Test yourselves to see whether you are living in faith.  
Examine yourselves. 2 Corinthians 13:5a*

There is a lethargy that comes upon anyone living day to day in the world: a progressive blindness to sin and its devastating consequences, an acceptance of veniality in one's words and actions, a slacking off in striving for virtue, a weakening of the will to stand out and make a difference in the world, and a sliding into a comfortable "fitting in to things" – many of which are death dealing to a living relationship with God, others and the world around us.

## **II LENT BEGINS ON ASH WEDNESDAY**

*The wages of sin is death,  
but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.  
Romans 6:23b*

Ash Wednesday is one of the boldest moments in the life of a Catholic. All the words, symbols and gestures said or used in the service challenge the way things are usually done in the world.

To make the ashes used in the service of Ash Wednesday we burn palms that were used the previous year in the service of Palm Sunday. We burn them right in the Church, in plain view of all. The palms are placed in the burning laver in the center of the assembly. The priest strikes a match and touches it to the palms. They flash up in a burst of flame and a billow of acrid smoke fills the Church. If any visual image brings to mind the Biblical truth that, "the wages of sin is death," (Romans 6:23) this certainly does. The palms burn down by the time the priest finishes the blessing over them. It doesn't take long to burn down a relationship or the world. The smoldering ashes are doused with a generous sprinkling of holy water, symbolizing the outpouring of God's grace and mercy on a ruined world.

"The wages of sin is death!" This is a short way of saying that sin has consequences, and the consequences of sin deal death, death in a hundred different forms: broken hearts, the loss of innocence, physical suffering, violence, the violation of personal integrity, destitution, war and famine. On Ash Wednesday Catholics face this unlovely truth squarely and acknowledge what many people vest a great deal of time and energy in denying: that the death is real, that it is all around us, and that it is the consequence of sin.

The pungent, acrid smoke rolls across the church. We are obliged to smell and even taste it and the truth it represents. It is very much "in our face". You cannot fail to hear the question being asked in all this: Whose sin? This question, that paralyzes millions

of our fellow citizens as well as whole institutions of our government and society, rises in our conscience and rings loudly in our ears: Who is responsible? All too often in our personal lives the answer is: No one is responsible! It has almost become an axiom of contemporary society: No one is responsible – for anything!

### **I Am Responsible**

In a Catholic Church on Ash Wednesday person after person comes forward to accept a sign in ashes that says: “I am responsible! I am responsible before God, before my fellow human beings and before my own conscience for the death at work in my life and our world.” If for nothing else, and there is indeed much else, it is for this answer that the world wants to see the moral authority of our ancient faith and Church broken. For Catholics, this is our finest hour!

Do you remember the story of Jesus’ encounter with the mob that goes out to arrest him in the Garden of Gethsemane:

*Jesus, aware of all that would happen to him, stepped forward and said to them, ‘Who is it you want?’ ‘Jesus the Nazorean,’ they replied. ‘I am he,’ he answered...They retreated slightly and fell to the ground. John 18:4-6*

The little journey millions of Catholics take up the aisle on Ash Wednesday, and the little cross in ashes we accept on our foreheads has the same effect on our fellow human beings and our society. It is completely countercultural. Jesus asked who they wanted to crucify, and when they replied, he said: “I am he.” Ash Wednesday asks the forbidden question: “Who is responsible? Whose sins are responsible?” And we reply: “I am. My sins are responsible.” The effect is stunning on the moral stupor that weaves itself over our personal lives, our relationships and the social institutions in which we participate. We disturb an uneasy peace whose foundation is denial. We contradict the insane assumption that no one is responsible. We blow away the cherished illusion that what I say and do doesn’t affect anyone but me. We break the unholy social contract that reads: If you don’t hold me accountable for our culture of death, I won’t hold you accountable.

### **I Am Available**

We do all of this in Church. We raise the specter of the death at work around us, not just before one another, but before God. We ask the question, “Who is responsible?” and acknowledge *before God* that sin – our sin – is the cause of this death. We believe that God receives our acknowledgement of responsibility as an acceptable personal sacrifice: *My sacrifice, O God, is a contrite spirit; a heart humbled and contrite you will not spurn. Psalm 51:19*

But we also believe that God asks a question of His own: “Where can the healing begin?” This casts a whole new light on our Ash Wednesday journey down the aisle for a mark in ashes on our foreheads. It is not an exercise in guilt, as some accuse, but an exercise in freedom and hope. In response to the question of responsibility we put to ourselves, the sign in ashes on our forehead says to God and to all: “I am responsible.”

In response to the question that God puts to us, the sign in ashes now says: “Begin with me, Lord. Let your healing begin here in my heart and with my words, my actions and my attitude.”

We human beings burn down our world – material and relational – again and again. On Ash Wednesday the eyes of God search the ashes of our world. His eyes find us, not to make us a scapegoat for the world’s sins and seal us in guilt, but to make us a beginning point for the life and hope God has in mind to raise up for all.

Marked with ashes, we celebrate the Sacrifice of the Mass. In the Eucharistic Prayer we meet Jesus, the Son of God, and hear him saying to us: “This is my body broken for you... This is my blood poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.” God is saying to us: “I have come to find you in the ashes of the consequences of your sin. I come to fulfill the promise I made:

*“I will sprinkle clean water upon you to cleanse you from all your impurities, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. I will give you a new heart and place a new spirit within you.”*  
*Ezekiel 36:25-26*

Immediately after hearing Jesus say these words to us we proclaim: “Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again!” God has no intention of hanging around in the ashes. God is intent on resurrection and life. In the Person of His Son, Jesus, God meets us in the ashes of the consequences of our sins, receives our acceptance of responsibility, pours out the blood he shed to cleanse us and set us free, and joins us to Himself as flesh of His flesh and blood of His blood in a Holy Communion of His life with ours. “Through him, with him, in him” we cry out at the end of the Eucharistic Prayer. “Through Jesus, with Him, and in Him” we rise from the ashes: from sin to virtue, from death to life. Christ died to meet us in the ashes, Christ rose to lead us out of the ashes, Christ lives in us and we in him to draw some part of the fabric of wounded humanity and a broken world back to life.

### **III BEGINNING WHERE JESUS BEGAN**

***Repent, and believe in the gospel!***

These are the words used when ashes are applied to the forehead of a Catholic on Ash Wednesday. They are taken directly from the first words Jesus says when he begins his public ministry: “*This is the time of fulfillment. The reign of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel!*” *Mark 1:15* It is important to understand what they mean and what they ask.

**Gospel** means “good news.” This “good news” is something specific: God is now present in the world in a way never before. God is present in the Person of His divine Son, Jesus. Though men put him to death, he rose from death and is now present to every man and woman, in every time and place for the rest of time. He is present to them whether they know it or not, acknowledge it or not, receive him or not. He is

a Savior for all. (Isaiah 43:1-13) There is more to this “good news.” God, in Jesus, has redeemed their lives, and is now present, in Jesus, offering to heal them and regenerate their lives – to restore them to the person they were created to be. This power of healing and regeneration is not won, earned or deserved. It is freely offered to all as a gift of love, and freely given to all who are willing to receive it. This gift of divine grace can be received from Jesus and drawn to every relationship a man or woman has: his relationship with himself (in his own mind and heart), his relationship with others (in marriage, family, community and enterprise), and his relationship to the things of the earth he handles in his labor, art and craft. This grace inspires, gives strength, and restores things to right order, both within a person and between all things around him. This is the Gospel: God is with us. Grace is offered. Things can be different.

**Believe** means “get intentional” about who is present and what is being offered. This means acknowledging the presence of Jesus with you in the moment, and asking for inspiration and strength beyond your own. Jesus says: “*Ask, and you will receive. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it will be opened to you.*” *Matthew 7:7*

**Repent** means “want to change and prepare to change,” because things *will* change – for the better! But understand that *everything* will begin to change in your life, not just the things you want to change. You will begin to take hold of life in a radically new way. Your life will begin to be re-formed.

#### IV

#### A TIME FOR SELF EXAMINATION

*Test yourselves to see whether you are living in faith.  
Examine yourselves. 2 Corinthians 13:5a*

Before Jesus began his public ministry he allowed himself to be put to the test. (Matthew 4:1ff) In Lent we join Jesus and take on this task as our own. We put ourselves to the test. Often we hear the Commandments read and say to ourselves, “I don’t really violate any of these,” or “I don’t really do anything that seriously wrong anymore.” When we say this, are we really being honest with ourselves? Jesus said, “*Wicked designs come from the deep recesses of the heart*” *Mark 7:21*. The truth is that our lives often easily become disordered in many ways:

**In how we lay hold of and possess things:**

holding our worldly wealth and possessions *as our own*, making little available for the service of God and others, reluctant to bring our resources to the aid and service of those we find in need.

**In how we seek to dominate others:**

finding ourselves wanting to control the lives of those around us, perpetually resentful because they do not make the choices we want them to make or do the things we want them to do, and punishing them for not.

**In our sexual attitude and behavior:**

indulging in sexual fantasies, seeking out suggestive sexual images to dwell upon,

having a lewd attitude or manner toward members of the sex to which we are attracted, treating them in demeaning ways.

**In what and how much we consume:**

seeking consolation in food or drink or in accumulating things.

**In the way we hold and express anger and resentment:**

harboring anger and resentment toward others, growing bitter or cynical about life, having a harsh or condemning attitude toward individuals or groups.

**In our relationship with God:**

We don't usually think about sinning against communion with God. But for a Christian this is the greatest sin of all: to speak or act cut off from our source of inspiration and strength. You may *receive* Holy Communion regularly – perhaps even with great reverence and devotion – but do you *enter into communion with Jesus*? Do you walk out of Church conscious of his presence with you? In each moment do you seek to be consciously in communion with him? Do you ask him for prudence and wisdom, and for inspiration in what to do or say? Or do you seek to be sufficient *in yourself* for every situation and task? In your prayers, do you find yourself asking God to make you self-sufficient for everything that needs or wants to be done? You were made by God, *for God*. The human spirit is designed and constructed to live *from God* in each moment and in the face of each task. For the human spirit to live *from itself alone* is an invitation to sadness and human tragedy. A human being living out of communion with God is something less than human.

*The Fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patient endurance, kindness, generosity, faith, mildness and chastity.*

*Galatians 5:19-26*

The Fruits of the Spirit are just that: fruit. They come to be by grace, the power of God working on us. We don't produce them out of our own nature. When we are living *in communion* with God, God produces these fruits in us. We call them "virtues." People admire them – especially in others. People like having those who possess these virtues around them. But do they really have them *for themselves*? Do they really want mildness and chastity? Do they have a heart-felt desire for patience endurance and kindness? Do they long for faith and generosity? Because they have no desire for them, they are not produced in them. Cultivating an ambitious desire for these virtues is vital. Jesus said: *Ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find, knock and the door shall be opened for you. Matthew 7:7* If you don't ask, you won't receive. If you don't seek, you won't find. If you don't knock, nothing will be open to you. Christians sin against these virtues most by not wanting them, and so they don't grow in them and they don't cultivate them in others.

*If we say, 'We are free of the guilt of sin,' we deceive ourselves. The truth is not to be found in us. But if we acknowledge our sins, he who is just can be trusted to forgive our sins and cleanse us from every wrong. 1 John 1:9*

**The Goal of Lent**

The goal of Lent is a pure heart, a clean mind, and a living relationship with God that

flows into our relationships with others and the things we handle in our labor, art, craft and enterprise. Purity of body, soul and spirit is essential to life as a human being. Without it you will not be able to recognize the integrity of the people and things in the world around you, nor will you be able to recognize the right and life-giving relationship between them. Your vision will not only be severely clouded by your impurity, but actually distorted to accommodate it. A person with a pure mind, body and spirit readily sees the integrity of people and things. A person with a pure mind, body and spirit readily recognizes the right order of things and knows when people and things are out of right relationship.

What does it mean to strive after purity? First, it means that you acknowledge clearly and without excuse the ways your mind, body and spirit have grown impure. Second, it means that you declare to God, to yourself and to others that these have to go – all of them. Third, it means that that you acknowledge the persons and situations that tempt you to impurity, and resolve to alter your life style and pattern of personal associations accordingly. If you are to succeed in attaining purity of body, mind and spirit, your motivation must be a passionate desire to see the world in true perspective, to honor the integrity of all things, and to heroically serve God in restoring all things to right and life-giving relationship with one another. This is repentance, and this is exactly what Jesus calls us to at the beginning of Lent: *Repent, and believe in the Gospel! Mark 1:14b*

### **Overcoming Obstacles**

*The Reign of God is at hand! Mark 1:14a* Jesus' presence and the power of God's Holy Spirit that flows from him is the *Reign of God* breaking into the world. Jesus is standing close by the side of each of us, holding out to us the power to reform our lives. Lent is about making ourselves fit for a life lived in communion with Jesus. This means clearing away any obstacles in the way of realizing Jesus' presence with us and of receiving the grace of healing he offers us. These obstacles fall into several categories.

**Mortal Sin:** These attitudes, words, actions and failures to act are toxic in an immediate and deadly way to the human person (body, soul and spirit), to relationship with God, to a just social order, and to the right and life-giving order of creation and its elements. In committing these sins, *something ruptures* in your relationship with Christ. Even more seriously, you become a witness contrary to Christ. When you repent and confess these sins Christ forgives them and your innocence is restored.

**Human Veniality:** These attitudes, words, actions, and failures to act compromise the integrity of a human person (body, soul and spirit), their relationship with God, a just social order, and the right order of creation and its elements. In committing these sins, *something is compromised* in your relationship with Christ. You *become* a venial person. These things may appear to be little and small shortcomings, but they make for a compromised moral character and a shrinking spiritual stature. When you become comfortable with them they make you complacent about virtue in yourself and cynical about virtue in others. You no longer spur others on to heroic love. Instead, you hold hands with them as you slide into moral mediocrity. This is no small concern for someone pledged to be a witness to Christ. Those who are ambitious to rise and stand

taller and who confess these sins are drawn by Jesus out of veniality and back into nobility of character.

**A Poisoned Heart:** There are things that distort our perception of God and the world around us. These are retained anger, un-forgiveness, cultivated bitterness and resentment, nourished hatred and hostility. They make the interior spirit of woman and man toxic for an encounter with God: preventing us from sensing God's presence and feeling the movement of the Holy Spirit within us. They distort our hearing of the Word of God in its integrity. They cloud our vision of beauty and the potential for the good in other people and in things. Those who pray ambitiously, asking each day for these toxic things to be dislodged, will have them flushed from their minds and hearts by the power of God's Holy Spirit.

**Possessiveness of People and Things:** This is laying hold of people or things in such a way that you expect them to be your salvation, things such as the acquisition of wealth, power or prestige. It could also be a relationship or association with someone that you hope will inform who you are and bolster your self-worth. This grasping at and clinging to people and things is born of fear – fear of deprivation, loneliness, abuse, manipulation, vulnerability, or even our mortality. When fear lays hold of the mind and heart, we are moved to grasp and cling to people and things that we believe will preserve us, save us, or at least give us control over our circumstances or those who control them. Those who turn in faith to Jesus find the grip of this fear released and their slavish dependency broken.

## V HEALING EXERCISES FOR THE SEASON OF LENT

Jesus says, “The Kingdom of God is at hand!” Matthew 4:17 The power of God for healing and transformation is available for each of us in Jesus. Jesus tells us to come to him, to turn to him and to ask for what we need. (Matthew 11:28-30 and Mathew 7:7) The stories in the Gospel of Jesus healing those who come to him show us that things within us, between us and around us can change. But Jesus calls us to himself for something larger than just to fix individual things that are wrong with us. He calls us to holiness – to ambitiously want to be the person God created us to be, a person in right relationship with all things. (See Matthew 5:1ff) Jesus identifies four exercises important for growing in holiness: Prayer (Matthew 6:5) , Fasting (Matthew 6:16), Almsgiving (Matthew 6:1), and Seeking True Riches (Matthew 6:19).

**Prayer:** Prayer draws power from the presence of God. Throughout the day repeatedly and intentionally bring yourself to mindfulness of the presence of Jesus. Call on his name, and seek his wisdom and strength in all you do. Don't just rely on your own. This is the essence of prayer, and in this way you *exercise* a living relationship with Jesus. To renew and strengthen this relationship is the heart of what Lent is about.

**Fasting** is a deliberate *cutting back* on the amount of something you consume. This means not only food and drink, but also things your mind consumes like watching TV, playing computer games, or the time you spend on Face Book, the Internet, talking on the phone or texting. Fasting is not supposed to be a contest or a grueling ordeal, but a preparation of the body, mind and interior spirit for prayer. It cleanses the body, mind and interior spirit, restoring them to balance. It gets them in shape to receive the presence and power of God. Fasting is only effective if it is done intentionally. This means you set aside time for it. It also means you give your fast a focus, a holy purpose like restoring to right use the thing(s) you are fasting from (food, alcohol, or watching TV). This holy purpose can also be to dislodge from your heart retained anger toward someone, bitterness about something, un-forgiveness, hatred, greed or lust. Your fast can be dedicated to someone other than yourself, perhaps someone you know who is seeking spiritual, mental or physical healing. It is absolutely important that each period of fasting culminate in a short time of prayer – ten or fifteen minutes in which you talk to the Lord about the goal of your fast, or ask the Lord how you should rightly be consuming (using) the things you are fasting from. Fasting is an excellent preparation for receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession). The point of fasting is to bring you fully attentive into the presence of God, or to restore things to right and balanced place in your life – a place that serves your relationship with God, others and the things of this world.

**Abstinence** is a self-impose *breaking off* being with someone, going somewhere, or doing something. Again, it is only effective if it is done intentionally. You should have a sense that something is out of right and life-giving order in your life. It could be a person, a thing or an activity. You choose to abstain from them for a while because you need to “sort out” if that person or thing has a healthy and balanced place in your life, or if they even belong in your life at all. Withdrawing from the use of them or time spent with them gives you space to think and pray about your relationship with them. Abstinence too, must be accompanied by short periods of prayer. You need to be talking to God about the issue. The point of abstinence is to ask God if and how you should be engaging these people and using these things in your life.

**Almsgiving** breaks the hold of possessiveness of things. All too easily things come to *possess you* more than you possess them. Money and material possessions are things we cling to when we are anxious or afraid. Almsgiving is giving them away, particularly to the poor and those who can in no way pay you back or give you a return. You break through the fear and are no longer defined by the things you possess or desire. You declare that you are defined by your relationship with God and others in a life-giving whole. You re-enter the flow of life: receiving, with gratitude to God, the good things that bless you and passing them on to bless others.

**Works of Charity** breaks the hold of possessiveness of people. Works of Charity are a gift of self in time and energy for the good of another – particularly those who cannot do for themselves, let alone do for you in return. Works of Charity break the hold of being confined and defined by others – by the relationship you have or desire with them. You move out of yourself to discover the sheer joy of giving of yourself with no thought of return. In this you root your self-confidence in your relationship with God.

**Confession:** To address Mortal Sin and veniality, a thorough examination of conscience and a carefully prepared confession of your sins in the Sacrament of Reconciliation is called for. Your self-examination should be thorough, honest, and complete. Your confession should be a clear naming of your sins to God. Your resolve should be firm and clear: these things have to go!

**Seeking True Riches:** In response to Jesus' call (Matthew 6:19), we ask ourselves: Am I valuing the people and things that matter most – things that will endure as a living part of me, right into eternal life? Are my priorities strait? Am I ambitious about the right things? Am I spending my time and energy on what matters most?

Lent is about drawing on God's grace to dislodge sin, scrub off veniality, break the grip of possessiveness, flush the heart clean of the poisons that have accumulated there, resetting priorities, and standing before God and all others as a woman or man more fully alive and in communion with God.

## VI LENT AND THE LANDSCAPE OF HUMAN RELATIONSHIP

What is wrong with the world is NOT what is wrong with the physical landscape in which we live as individuals and collectively as humanity. If human beings were removed from the picture, the physical world would quickly return to the life-generating “rhythms” and “harmonies” in which God first fashioned it as a life-sustaining whole. What is wrong with the world is what is wrong with the human landscape. This is not material. It is relational.

Relationship is of the essence of being human. We were made for relationship. We discover who we are in relationship. Of its essence, religion is about relationship. It is about the initiative of God for the healing and regeneration of our relationships.

Human consciousness opens outward in three directions. The human world of relationship is constructed in three dimensions. We were created for:

- 1) relationship with God, the Origin of our being,
- 2) relationship with our fellow human beings (in configurations of family, friends, neighbors, collaborators in art, craft and labor),
- 3) relationship with the elements of the physical world we handle in our labor, our art, our craft and our enterprise.

### **Relationship with God**

Of these three, relationship with the Origin of our being is the most essential. Right relationship with God informs us of the meaning of our existence. It progressively discloses to us our true self, and generates confidence in the value of our existence. It keeps our relationships in the other two dimensions – with other human beings and with the elements of the world – fluid and life-generating. It also provides strength to forbear in virtue and love.

It is from a person's relationship with God that a person draws Divine inspiration and strength to forge living relationships with other people and with the things she handles in her labor, her art, her craft and her enterprise. It is also from this dimension of human relationship that a person draws Divine power to dislodge anything that has accumulated in her heart and mind that distorts her perception of her fellow human beings and the elements she handles – things that might drive her to misuse them.

### **Relationship with Others**

A stable, life-giving relationship with God is the ground of stable, life-giving relationships with our fellow human beings. We draw grace (inspiration and strength) from God which flows through us into our relationships with others. In a living relationship with God, a person ceaselessly draws inspiration and strength to shape and animate his interaction with the other people in his world. This enables him to avoid damaging these relationships with his attitudes, words and actions, and to strengthen and help these relationships unfold to their full potential. This enables the people with whom he relates to become more healthy and whole. This "greater life" he engenders in others flows back to him as an enduring joy, and through him returns to God in praise and thanksgiving. In all this he finds fulfillment as a human being. The biblical word for this is "shalom," an integrated existence in the life of the human community.

### **Relationship with the Elements of the World**

A stable, life-giving relationship with God is also the ground of stable, life-giving relationships with the elements of our physical world. We draw grace (inspiration and strength) from God which flows through us into our relationships with the elements of the world we handle in our labor, our art, our craft, and in the enterprise we share with others. In a living relationship with God, a person ceaselessly draws inspiration and strength to shape and animate how she handles the elements of the world. This enables her to avoid abusing and damaging them by violating their integrity and their life-sustaining relationship with each other, and allows her to unfold their full potential for the good of the whole and the good of all. The achievement of a greater good for all, in keeping with the integrity of each, flows back to her as an enduring joy, and through her is lifted up to God in praise and thanksgiving. In this she finds fulfillment as a human being: an integrated existence in the life of the physical world.

### **The Vortex of Human Relationship**

At the center or vortex of all human relationship is the human mind and heart. It is the spiritual organ for relationship. If it is damaged, encumbered or impeded, it will affect a person's capacity for relationship in each of the three dimensions we have been discussing. A person's mind and heart must remain clear at all times. What damages the heart of a person, what encumbers and impedes it as a vessel for relationship, are the dark things it accumulates over time: the memory of past abuse, out of which grows suspicion and distrust of others; the harboring of resentment and bitterness that hardens the heart against forgiveness, mercy and reconciliation; the nursing of retained anger that leads to the hatred of others, and to envy and jealousy at the success of others. This spawns greed and lust in the human mind and heart. All these things, held in the mind and heart of a person cloud her vision when she contemplates God and looks at the

people and things around her. Seeing them through her anger, bitterness, jealousy, lust, and all the rest, she is blinded to their integrity (sometimes even to their reality), and to their life-giving connection with each other. Their beauty and potential for the good being distorted in her perception, she all too readily abuses them.

A person cannot communicate with God without these things held in his mind and heart grossly distorting the prayers he offers and his ability to recognize any grace being given. Should grace break through, it makes its way through his encumbered heart and darkly clouded mind with the greatest difficulty. His expressions of love toward other people are warped by these things, and they work to alienate him from the people he encounters and the things he handles. Unable to see reality as it truly is – for the beauty it contains and the potential for the good it possesses – a person progressively loses the joy of a genuinely human life. Nothing and no one can simply be delighted in. They can only be enjoyed as a utilitarian means to an end or for their entertainment value.

It is only from God that a person can draw Divine power to dislodge these things. Once cleared of this debris the heart and mind begin to function again as an organ of human relationship. Continuously drawing grace (insight, inspiration and strength) from God, through her mind and heart, and into her relationships with other people and things, keeps her mind clear and her heart unencumbered. It is vital to pray before interacting with another person and before engaging in work. Both become infinitely more fruitful.

### **The Consolation Prize for Failure in Relationship**

One can, of course, be very successful at getting what he wants, when he wants it, and the way he wants it. But to succeed he must learn the dark arts of manipulating people and things to his advantage, even in total disregard for their integrity. His success as a person can then be measured by the things he accumulates, the wealth he amasses, and the power and influence he wields over others. But what is utterly lost to him is genuine “communion” with anyone or anything.

Communion is a relationship in which the integrity of each is served, the beauty of each is delighted in, and each are nourished by the good they offer and receive from one another. Through this you become a living part of the life of another, and they a living part of yours. In death everything you accumulate – all the wealth gained and the power and influence wielded over others – must be surrendered. But that with which you have “come into communion” will be carried by you beyond the threshold of death. No one and nothing with which you have a genuine human relationship will be lost to you. It will have become an integral part of who you are. Some people who were accounted great in the world will be left an empty nothingness. Others who were accounted least in the world will be immensely fulfilled. (Matthew 16:26)

### **Getting Intentional About Relationship (Learning to Pray Always)**

There is a wide-spread misconception that a person must pray to “win” God’s attention and to “gain” God’s help. Christian faith proclaims that the Presence of God is already close to the side of each man or woman – whether they know it or not, whether they

realize it or not. Christian faith proclaims that God is not only present in Jesus, but that God is extending to each the grace they need: healing, insight, inspiration, or strength. Prayer exercises the living relationship with God that is essential to being a human being.

In genuine prayer we become intentional about the presence of God and the grace God offers us. We explicitly acknowledge God's presence with us and open ourselves to receive the grace being offered. To find healing as a human being – to become whole as a human being – Jesus tells us that we must learn to pray “always” (Luke 18:1). Doing this is not difficult. It takes very little time – just a “mental moment” really. But it must be done in all three dimensions.

### **Prayer in the Dimension of Engaging God:**

**Lord,  
Dislodge from my mind and heart any dark thing  
of anger, bitterness, hatefulness, un-forgiveness,  
jealousy, envy, lust or greed. (Name them.)  
I want them broken loose and removed from my  
mind and heart. I cannot do this by myself.  
Take hold of them and draw them away from me.**

The fruit of this is a clear mind, a pure heart and an accurate perception of the world around us.

### **Prayer in the Dimension of Engaging People:**

**Lord, Be with me.  
Give me sight of the beauty and goodness  
in these people. Inspire me to words and actions  
that draw it out. Protect me from getting hooked  
on their rough edges. Let no darkness they carry  
cling to me.**

The fruit of this is: clearer sight of the beauty in others and genuine delight in it, insight into the good in them, joy in their growth and successes, protection from getting hooked by their rough edges and any darkness that may be in them, freedom from resentment, and the peace of genuine communion with them.

### **Prayer in the Dimension of Engaging Things in Life and Labor:**

**Lord, Be with me.  
Give me sight and sense of the deeper meaning of  
the things I handle – a living sense of their integrity  
and their place in how things work together as  
a living whole. Inspire me to work with them in  
a way that unfolds their potential for the good of all.**

The fruit of this is: seeing things clearly in their integrity and life-sustaining relationship with each other and in a larger, living whole, insight into their potential, inspiration as to how to unfold it for the good of all, joy in creativity, and the peace

of having labored well and unfolded the good for all.

This is what it means to “pray always.” It draws a living stream of grace (insight, inspiration and strength) from God and into our relationships with people and things. As a result, we truly “meet” each other, and unfold the potential of the things we handle in our art, craft, labor and enterprise. It allows us to see the world in true perspective. We are no longer blinded, either to its darkness or to its beauty and potential for the good. We find ourselves repeatedly surprised by what God draws out of us and what God is doing in the situation in which we find ourselves. We rejoice in a greater life given to all. We gain a genuine joy in being alive, and a deep sense of wholeness as a human being.

## VII TRACING A SPIRITUAL PATH THROUGH THE WEEKS OF LENT

The Scripture readings of Ash Wednesday and the Sundays of Lent<sup>1</sup> open up a path of healing for human relationship. Here are the steps along this Lenten path.

### **Ash Wednesday:**

***“Reform your lives and believe in the gospel.” Mark 1:15***

Lent begins with a call to intentionality. On Ash Wednesday we personally accept this call. Commit yourself to becoming “intentional” about the Gospel: God is present with you in Jesus, at every moment and in every situation, and he holds in his hands the grace to heal you and your relationships. Commit yourself to becoming intentional about believing (which is to acknowledge Jesus’ presence in each moment and to call on his name). Commit yourself to become intentional about reforming your life: examining the state of your heart and your relationship with God, with others and with the things you handle, and drawing the grace Jesus offers into your life to reform the way you live.

### **The First Week:**

***Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights... Matthew 4:1-2***

Agree to be led by the Holy Spirit out into the desert with Jesus for these forty days. Decide that this will be a *personal Lent*. The first step is to examine your relationship with God. In a little quiet time intentionally set aside early in the week, examine yourself:

God said:

*“Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone!  
Therefore, you shall love the LORD, your God, with your whole heart,  
and with your whole being, and with your whole strength.” Deuteronomy 6:4-5*

Do I “Love the Lord, my God, with all my heart, and with all my soul and with all my

---

<sup>1</sup> Especially the Scripture readings of Cycle A for Lent.

strength? How much has my relationship with God become: “I’ll pay attention to You when there is something I want out of You, otherwise, I’ll run my own life.” Am I running my life well? Would those who know me say that I am running it well?

Jesus Said:

*“Come, follow me!” Matthew 4:19*

Do I have a living relationship with Jesus? Am I regularly calling on him and seeking the grace that he is holding out to me? Press yourself for honest answers. Take the time to write them down in a Lenten journal. Name the truth to yourself and to Jesus. Pray: “Lord, I want the root of my strength to be in you!”

Effective prayer must emerge from your soul. Our prayers easily drift back into being: “Lord, give me what I want. Make things how I want them to be.” When we pray this way, we often don’t feel that God is there for us. This is because God isn’t. He is not a tool for getting what I want, when I want it and how I want it. Our prayer must be about who I am. We must reach into our soul, deep within. Here it takes shape: “Lord, show me who you made me *to be*. Show me the gift you have given me *to give* for the life of others. I want to see the pattern in which I was formed by You to be the unique person you created me to be. You will never fail to find God here, because God never leaves here. God never ceases to long for you to throw off your old self and rise to become your true self in Christ. You cannot do this alone. It is not a matter of wishing for it, nor is it a function of moral fortitude. It is a gift of a living relationship with Christ. The personal renewal of Lent begins here, in renewed prayer.

### **The Second Week:**

***“We are being transformed from glory to glory into his image by the Lord who is the Spirit.” 2 Corinthians 3:18***

*Are you being transformed from glory to glory into his image?*

Or are you shriveling into sadness and progressively growing isolated from others and life? In a little time set aside early in the week, take a hard look at the dark things you have accumulated in your heart: the memory of past abuse, suspicion and distrust, resentment and bitterness toward others, un-forgiveness, retained anger, envy of what others have, jealousy at their success. Take note of what you find. Write it in your journal. These things encumber the heart and cloud the mind, they distort how you see the world and everyone and everything in it. They blind you to their beauty and goodness.

Having joined Jesus on this Lenten journey, he leads us first to our hearts.

The Bible says:

*“More tortuous than anything is the human heart,  
beyond remedy; who can understand it? Jeremiah 17:9*

It is what is lodged in the heart that renders us blind to the goodness and beauty in all things, even God. We cannot see it through the storm of anger and hostility, and the haze of bitterness and resentment we carry within our hearts, which rise again and again to fill our minds in any given moment. Jesus said it plainly:

*“What comes out of a person, that is what defiles.  
From within people, from their hearts, come evil thoughts,  
unchastity, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit,  
licentiousness, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, folly.  
All these evils come from within and they defile.” Mark 7:20-23*

The good news is that there is still time. God says:

*“In an acceptable time I heard you,  
and on the day of salvation I helped you.”  
Behold, now is a very acceptable time;  
behold, now is the day of salvation.” 2 Corinthians 6:2*

You have too much life to live. Live it free! The goodness and beauty that fills this day is yours. Don't remain blind to it – absorbed in your angers and resentments. The God who loves you is standing next to you in the person of Jesus, holding out His grace to set you free. Open your heart to it and draw it in with all your might.

Every morning, after you brush your teeth, look into the mirror and pray: “Jesus, there are things in my heart and my mind that have to go: (name them). I cannot do this by myself.” Consciously drawing strength from Jesus pray: “Lord, tear them out. Pull them away and set me free. I want my life back.” Are there people who feed these dark things in your mind and heart when you are with them? What activities immerse you in these things? What places are toxic with them? Here are things you should “give up” for Lent – and perhaps for good! Now is the time to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

You cannot afford to skip this step, and just get on with the others. To do so makes Lent “mechanical:” a series of resolutions, “doings” and “not doings.” You can fast, but what good does it do to fast with a heart heavy with anger. You can give up things, but what good does it do to give them up in a cloud of resentment. You can perform acts of charity, but what good does it do if in your bitterness you look to see if it is appreciated enough, and turn dark and resentful when it is not. This week's focus is key to a successful Lent. It unlocks the door to everything: a more immediate sense of God's presence with you, the feeling that you are “at home” in your world, a richer appreciation of your life as a gift, more satisfying relationships with all the people in your life (even the problematic ones), a deeper sense of purpose in your labor, clearer sight of the beauty in all things around you.

### **The Third Week:**

*“(Jesus said,) ‘Go and call your husband’... ‘I have no husband,’  
replied the woman. ...‘You have had five (Jesus said), and the man  
you are living with now is not your husband.” John 4:16*

Dead in her relationships with everyone, Jesus draws near to the woman at the well. This week take a careful look at your relationship with others. Where are they breaking down or broken? Where are they withering from neglect? Where have you given up on them? Have you become cold, distant or even abusive to the people with whom you live and work? Are you disruptive of their relationships with each other? In a little quiet time early in the week, call on the name of Jesus and deliberately bring these

things to mind. Write them down in your journal. Each day ask for the healing and regeneration of these relationships. Perhaps focus on one each day. If you know that you will be with people who are difficult to get along with, call on the name of Jesus beforehand. Ask for protection against getting hooked by their barbed comments or bad behavior, and for the strength to be true to your best self. Consciously draw grace from your relationship with God while you are with them. Ask for clarity of mind and heart to see the beauty and goodness in them. Ask for inspiration to speak and act in ways that draw this beauty out. Ask to be given strength not to be thrust back into the cycle of accumulating anger and resentment toward them. Regeneration will begin to take place in these relationships.

It is time to decide what acts of charity you might do for Lent. The sacrifice and gift of yourself for others enormously enhances the healing of your body, mind and spirit.

#### **The Fourth Week:**

*“I was blind before and now I see.” John 9:35*

This week address the way you handle the things you use in living, and in your labor, art, craft and enterprise. Make the conscious intention to [pray before you do work of any kind, asking for clarity of mind and heart to see the beauty and to understand the integrity of each thing you handle. Ask for inspiration to handle these things in ways that honor their integrity, their living relationship to other things, and their place in the whole of a life-giving world.

People misuse things to compensate for the loss of a confident sense of themselves, and when their personal relationships are strained or break down. They violate the integrity of the things to make a greater profit. They destroy or damage things in moments of frustration and anger. After work they console themselves with the over consumption and accumulation of things, and distract themselves by entertaining themselves with them. What things are you misusing or abusing? Take time to pray before you go to work, and again after you leave. Call on the name of Jesus and ask for the strength not to misuse things out of the sadness in your heart in order to console yourself. Ask Jesus to break any addictive hold things might have on you. While you work, consciously draw strength from Jesus into the way you handle things and treat the people with whom you work. You will find yourself once again able to see the world and all things in it in true perspective, to catch sight of their beauty and their potential for the good. The grace of healing will begin to flow into all you do.

Here you may find more things that you want to give up for Lent, and perhaps for good. You might also fast or abstain from food, drink or entertainment you have been using for the wrong purpose. It is time to give alms – to take from your things and give to the need of others. This greatly enhances the regeneration of your life.

#### **The Fifth Week:**

*“Lazarus, come out! Unbind him and let him go free.” John 11: 44*

This week join Jesus before the tomb of his dead friend. Pray for any of your friends or family members who carry darkness in their heart. Pray for those you know who are clouded in mind, dead in relationship, and addicted to the abuse of things. In a little time set aside each day, call them to mind, one after another, and bring them before

Jesus, asking that his grace break through to them and set them free. At Mass consciously lift them up at the time Jesus says: *This is my blood poured out for you.* Ask Jesus to pour his blood over them, to heal them and regenerate their lives and their relationships. Pray from your heart for their freedom and their resurrection to new life. In doing this you become one with the heart of God for the healing of the world. Drawing grace from your relationship with God, you bring others to Jesus for healing – in your prayers, in your worship and in your witness to them.

### **Palm Sunday:**

***“Crucify him! Crucify him!” Mark: 15:12-14***

On Palm Sunday and throughout Holy Week we face the reality of suffering in the world. Suffering comes to us in four ways:

- 1) Suffering comes from the contingencies of life in illness, poverty, natural disaster, the loss of employment, the death of a loved one,
- 2) Suffering comes from the sins of others whose words and actions mock, belittle, humiliate, marginalize, injure and defraud,
- 3) Suffering also comes when the consequences of your own sins are visited back upon you in the ruin of your life and character, and finally
- 4) suffering comes in rebuffs and rejection, disapproval and opposition when you try to be your best self in relationship with others and when you speak up and do the right thing. There is probably a little of all four in the life of most adults.

There are two paths can take. You can whine and blame, become cynical, grow hostile and become violent toward others and life. This path leads to death, and sometimes the death of many. Jesus opens a different path for you to take: a heroic path, his path. You can, despite your sufferings, choose to value the gift and purpose of your life. You can choose to see the good and do the good for yourself, others and the world around you. This is exactly what we see Jesus doing in the last two days of his life.

As we read the passion account at Mass, consciously join your suffering to the suffering of Jesus. Choose, with Jesus, to take firm hold of the meaning of your life – the full weight and import of the good you can do and the light can bring to the world. With Jesus, step through your suffering. Draw this grace from Jesus, both at Mass and in your time of prayer, and allow it to flow into your trials.

### **Holy Week:**

***“God so loved the world that He gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him may not die, but may have eternal life.” John 3:16***

You have spent the season of Lent becoming intentional about the Presence of God in Jesus. You have grown intentional about receiving the grace he offers to you in each moment, and drawing it into your heart to free you from the dark things that have accumulated there – things that cloud your mind and blind you to the beauty and goodness in people and all things. You have grown intentional about drawing this grace into your relationships with others, especially where those relationships have grown weak and are failing – grace to see the beauty and potential for the good in each person, and to not get hooked by the darkness in them. You have grown

intentional about drawing God's inspiration and strength into your relationship with the things and people you handle in your work, your art, your craft and your enterprise – grace to know and honor their integrity and not to violate their right and life-giving relationship with each other.

It is time to lift your gaze from the hands of Jesus, that hold out his grace to you, and focus your attention on the heart of Jesus that is the source of this grace. Focus your attention on the immense love that is God, and that sacrificed itself for your healing and the healing of all. Intentionally move the eyes of your soul from what you get from God, to the love that moves God to offer it to you. Tragically, this is seldom, if ever, done either in relationship with God or in human relationship. We never get around to stop looking at what others do for us and give to us, and to pay attention to the love that moves them to do so. During these holy days, resolve to think of nothing but God's love poured out for you in Jesus, and in those people in your life who are an instrument of His love. Pray to experience it more deeply, and to be drawn into it. This is what makes Holy Week, "Holy." Cast yourself into the heart of the Divine, into that love that sacrifices itself to give life to the world, into that love that is God (1 John 4:16). Remind yourself that this love is at the origin of the universe and all things in it. Remember that this love brought you into existence. It can become your own. And becoming your own it can and will redefine your relationship with everything.

### **Easter Sunday:**

***"He has been raised up. He is not here." Mark 16:6***

It is Easter! We celebrate that Jesus is risen. Hopefully, we can celebrate that you have risen too – through him, with him and in him. Hopefully, you have risen with him to be a new man or woman, a better man or woman than the one you left behind during Lent. In your heart there should be a desire that everyone you know would share this new life with you. The first disciples proclaimed: *"We are his witnesses."* Acts 2:32 Jesus is standing at the side of everyone and offering them the grace to heal and be restored to new life. Get intentional about sharing this "Good News" with them.

## **EASTER**

*After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene came with the other Mary to inspect the tomb. Suddenly there was a mighty earthquake, as the angel of the Lord descended... The angel spoke, addressing the women: "Do not be frightened. I know that you are looking for Jesus the Crucified, but he is not here. He has been raised, exactly as he promised... Go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has been raised from the dead and now goes ahead of you to Galilee, where you will see him. That is the message I have for you...' " Suddenly, without warning, Jesus stood before them and said, "Peace!" The women came up and embraced his feet...Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid! Go and carry the news to my brothers that they are to go to Galilee, where they will see me."*

*Matthew 28:1-11*

***“As the first day of the week was dawning”***

The Easter Gospel begins with a specific reference to time: it is dawn of the first day of the week, the day we now call Sunday – the Sunday immediately after Jesus death and burial. This detail about time, along with those about the place and his physical presence to the women serve to make it clear that Jesus actually, physically rose from the dead. It is the Christian witness that he was actually seen and physically touched. We can draw something more from this reference that, “the first day of the week was dawning.” The Book of Genesis (Chapter 1:1 to 2:4) describes creation as being formed by God in six days, with God resting from His labor on the seventh day, the Sabbath. The Book of Genesis also describes the disorder that human sin brought into creation and the resulting pain, suffering and chaos that touches the lives of all of us (Chapter 2:25 to 4:16). The Gospel shows Jesus drawing the pain and suffering of fallen creation and humanity to himself, as person after person approaches him to be healed. In the last week of his life Jesus confronts the sin at the root of this suffering. This week of awesome confrontation culminates in Jesus dying on Friday and “resting” in death on the seventh day, the Sabbath (Saturday). Now, at daybreak on the first day of a new week (Sunday), Jesus rises to life in the power of a new creation, a creation free of sin and free from the distortion of sin’s terrible consequences. The risen Lord has a message for his disciples and for all men and women. It is delivered first by the angel then by himself. For those who believe this message, the dawn of this “first day” of Jesus’ resurrected life becomes the dawn of a new day in their personal lives – the “first day” of a personal new creation.

***“This is the message I have for you...”***

Both the angel and Jesus deliver the same two-part message:

The angel: *“Do not be frightened...”*

Jesus: *“Do not be afraid...”*

The angel: *“He has been raised from the dead and now goes ahead of you...where you will see him.”*

Jesus: *They are to go to Galilee, where they will see me.”*

Notice that while the first part of the message is not to be afraid, the second part is the reason not to be. Let’s take a closer look at the reason.

***“He has been raised from the dead...”***

Jesus actually rose from the dead – not just spiritually, morally or figuratively – but physically. This means the presence of the risen Jesus affects everything in the “real” world. Jesus did not just rise for himself. He rose so that “real” men and women living in a “real” world could rise out of an old existence into a new one: out of crippling dependencies and addictions into freedom and confidence, out of sin into virtue, from death to life. Because he really rose, all of us living in the real world now have a choice: We can wake up each morning to one more day of the same old disorder with all its pain and suffering, or we can rise to the “first day” of an entirely new existence. What makes the difference? He does! The real presence of Jesus makes the difference.

***“He...now goes ahead of you...”***

The “real” Jesus, the Jesus who walked the streets of Jerusalem and the roads of

Galilee, the one you read about in the Gospels, has risen and gone ahead of you. He has personally “gone ahead” to every time and situation in the day and week ahead of you, especially those that will be the most trying: those were you will confront the greatest hardship, that will bring you face to face with your most feared inadequacies, that will tempt you the strongest, and in which you will be the most anxious and afraid. When you arrive at these moments, He will have arrived before you. He will already be there, personally present and waiting for you.

***“You will see him.”***

If you acknowledge the presence of Jesus in any moment or situation, you will *experience* (“see”) his presence and his power transforming both you and the situation you are in. Aware and connected to his presence, you will speak and act differently – breaking through fear and anxiety, resisting temptation, experiencing a peace and a confidence you never knew before. Aware and connected to his presence you will see things, hear things and understand things in the situation that you would otherwise have missed. Aware and connected to his presence you will be startled at the unexpected changes in yourself and what unfolds around you. He is alive!

***“There is no salvation in anyone else,  
for there is no other name in the whole world  
given to us by which we are to be saved.” Acts 4:12***

Believe the message: Jesus is risen! Jesus has gone ahead of you! He has arrived and is present in every place and moment this day will take you! Exercise this message is your heart. Before everything you do throughout the day and when moving from one thing to another, stop and pronounce the name “Jesus” in your heart. Let the saying of his name remind you that you are not alone. Let it connect you in a personal way to his presence. Let it assure you that at some point in this moment and situation you will *experience* the transforming power of the resurrection either within yourself or in the unfolding of the moment or both. Do you literally have to pause, and actually say his name? Absolutely, and with faith and conviction: *“If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”* Romans 10:9

**Jesus, You are with me in this moment. Show me what is really going on.  
Help me to listen deeply before I speak, then inspire me as to what  
to say or do. Give me the strength of your Holy Spirit to do it.**

Jesus rose for a reason: to be present to you and to walk the path of life with you. *I am the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6)*, he said. *Come follow me! (Matthew 4:19)* He walked the path of human existence before you and personally experienced its joys and sorrows. He confronted hardship, tragedy, suffering and death, and walked through them without surrendering the purpose and meaning of his life to anger, bitterness or despair. He emerged from these trials greater of soul and radiant in spirit. He is risen and is present to you so that you might do the same. The Bible says:

*The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.  
By the Lord has this been done and it is wonderful in our eyes.  
Psalm 118:22-23 and Matthew 21:4*

Make these two truths the cornerstone of your life, the rock of strength upon which you lean for support:

**You are not alone** – at any time, in any place or before any hardship or difficulty. He is *with you always until the end of all things* (Matthew 28:20). You will experience his presence each time you call upon him. Even in your struggle to be free of sin, you are not alone. He is there to cleans you, raise you to your feet and to walk forward with you.

**We are not alone.** He is present among us as we gather for worship. We know his presence with us in *the breaking of the bread* (Luke 24:35) — the Eucharist and the other Sacraments.

## THE EASTER SEASON

The spiritual focus for the fifty days of the Easter season is taken from the Book of the Acts of the Apostles in the New Testament. In the Book of Acts, Jesus calls his disciples to be witnesses:

*You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes down on you; then you are to be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, yes, even to the ends of the earth. Acts of the Apostles 1:8*

The first disciples describe themselves as witnesses – witnesses to Jesus’ resurrection:

*This is the Jesus God has raised up, and we are his witnesses.*  
*Acts 2:32*

*You put to death the author of Life. But God has raised him from the dead, and we are his witnesses. Acts 3:15*

Being a witness to Jesus’ resurrection means more than seeing Jesus again after he died and telling people that you did. It means being a personal witness to the fact that Jesus is alive, and that he is resurrection to new life for all who turn to him and call upon him.

What does this have to do with you? You are a personal witness to the resurrection and new life that comes to you, again and again, in your relationship with Jesus. You have *experienced* it! You need to exercise yourself in it. Every day during the Easter Season, in a moment of prayer, you should explicitly acknowledge the places in your life where God’s grace came to you during Lent and is now working a change in you. This might be a dark thing, like anger or bitterness that was loosened and is being removed from your heart. This might be a change for the better in your attitude, the words you use or the actions you engage in with others. It might be new growth in your relationship with God or a change in the way you handle things in your work. Whatever it is, it needs to be “witnessed to.” The power of resurrection and new life came to you during Lent. It is real and at work in you. Thank God for it daily in prayer, and ask God to keep it growing in you.

You also need to “witness to it” in others. This means paying attention to your Christian brothers and sisters who have taken the journey of Lent with you, and pointing out to them where you see something new and good at work in them, telling them that you notice these changes that have taken place and that you rejoice in their growth in holiness.

It should be “witnessed” to anyone you know that may still be trapped in darkness of heart and in bondage to things that prevent them from entering into communion with God, others and the things in the world around them. Jesus is there for them too. Grace is available. Things can be different. Healing and a new life is possible. If God gives you the opportunity, witness to it. Tell them about it, and how the presence and power of Jesus works in you and can work in them.

During the Easter Season it is also important to harvest the fruit of the spiritual exercises you did during Lent, in particular, your fast or abstinence from certain things. Now that Lent is over, there is the temptation to think that you just go back to doing things the way you did them before Lent began – to all the old patterns of consumption, the accumulation of things, absorption with activity, and obsession with people. To do this is to miss the point of fasting and abstinence. If you gave up certain foods or watching TV, or if you fasted from your normal use of your devices, then you intentionally created an opportunity to ask God and yourself IF you should be using them, and HOW you should be using them. Withdrawing from them or cutting back in the use of them gave you space to think and pray about your relationship with them, so that now if you go back to them, you use them differently, more wholesomely and more in keeping with God’s will. Giving up eating sweets for Lent, for instance, should mean that you go back to eating them after Easter in a whole new and better balanced way. Perhaps some things you gave up for Lent you never go back to at all, because the grace of God helped you see that they were no good for you.

The Easter Season is a celebration of grace given, grace at work and grace bearing fruit. It is also a time to exercise your relationship with Jesus to keep that grace flowing and working. Jesus is risen, and we with him! We are witnesses to this.