

Joyful steps

Daily Lenten Devotions



FR. THOMAS CONNERY

Ash Wednesday

But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to be fasting, except to your Father who is hidden. And your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you. MATTHEW 6:17-18

THE NEXT PATIENT proceeded to the admittance desk at the local hospital. “Has your diet changed?” asked the receptionist. The near 90-year-old patient gave her a stern look. “Yes,” she said. “For Lent, I gave up whipped cream on my Jell-O, hard candy and my two beers a night.” Then, following a short pause, she said, “And look where it’s gotten me!”

Today we begin Lent. Lent is the typical time when we sharpen our focus on our spiritual life. Hopefully we are more in tune with things of God. Fasting is one of them. It’s strange how we will give up foods to look good at the beach or at the class reunion, but for divine purposes, not so much. Fasting is powerful. I suggest that if you do fast from food items, have a purpose. Make it your prayer for someone in need of God’s intervention. I believe that by doing so, you will see God’s intervention and blessings.

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Father, bless this day as I begin my journey of Lent. May it be a time of renewal in my life and may I follow more closely your son, Jesus. Amen.

Thursday after Ash Wednesday

*Then [Jesus] said to all,
“If anyone wishes to come after me,
he must deny himself and take up
his cross daily and follow me.”* LUKE 9:23

A FEW YEARS AGO, a researcher asked 100 American and Japanese college students to take a piece of paper. On one side, they wrote down the decisions in life they would like to make for themselves. On the other, they wrote the decisions they would like to pass on to others. The Americans filled up the side for decisions they want to decide for themselves—where to live, what job to take, etc. The other side was almost blank. The only “decision” they commonly wanted to hand off to others was, “When I die.” The Japanese were just the opposite. The Japanese filled up the back side of the sheet with things they wanted others to decide—what they wore, what time they woke up, what they did at their job.

We Americans like to be in control. As Christians, we strive to surrender that control to Jesus, for he is our Lord. We deny ourselves in order to follow him. We follow his advice in matters of forgiveness, generosity and even our relationships. Through prayer, discernment and effort, we give it all over to Jesus—even when it hurts. But we will not be alone. He promises to always be with us.



Father, I like my independence. It is part of my heritage. I want to be in control. Yet, to be content, I know that my joy is in your will. It is not what I want, but rather, what you want. Grant me the humility to surrender my will to your plans. Only there will I find my peace. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

Friday after Ash Wednesday

*Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer,
you shall cry for help, and he will say: "Here I am!"* ISAIAH 58:9

A LARGE, INTERNATIONAL HOTEL CHAIN offers a guarantee for their rooms. If you aren't satisfied, you don't have to pay. That's right, if you aren't happy, you don't have to pay for your hotel services. It sounds like a big gamble for the company, but so far it is working. They are so confident in their overnight experience that the company can offer this guarantee, knowing that 99% of the people won't use it.



That is what we want from our prayers. We want a guarantee. I'm sure you have come across this promise that if you say a particular prayer, it is never known to fail. Or maybe you are asked to make ten copies of the prayer and pass them out. In our reading today, we hear that the people fasted. And they surely thought that God would have to come through. That is not the case. What works? Caring for the poor, the widow and orphan. God promises that when you care for them, he will take care of you. "When you call, I will answer. Here I am." That is his guarantee.



Father, I want to honor you this Lent. I also want to have you answer my prayers. I think if I say certain prayers or give up certain foods, you will be pleased and bless me. May your promise in your word today remind me that you take notice when we care for the less fortunate. May I not only pray it but do it as well. Amen.

Saturday after Ash Wednesday

Those who are healthy do not need a physician, but the sick do. LUKE 5:31

TRYING TO CONTROL HER DRY HAIR, a woman treated her scalp with olive oil before washing it. Worried that the oil might leave an odor, she washed her hair several times. That night, when she went to bed, she leaned over to her husband and asked, “Do I smell like olive oil?”

“No,” he said, sniffing.

“Do I smell like Popeye?”

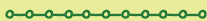
We all smell. We all have a stench. It is called sin. We are all in need of God's grace. Not to worry, for Jesus came to save us. Jesus does not come looking for the perfect, but for those who know they have God's grace in their life. There's no need to find excuses; we only need to admit that we need Jesus' help. This Lent, take time to look over your life and see where you have failed. Turn your sins over to God.

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Father, I don't always want to admit that I am a sinner, that I am in need of grace. I like to think that I can make it on my own. Somehow, I think if I am perfect, you will love me more. May I come to you as I am, but leave better from knowing you. I ask this in the name of Jesus, the Redeemer. Amen.

First Sunday of Lent



The kingdom of God is at hand.
Repent, and believe in the gospel. **MARK 1:15**

TWO ELDERLY WOMEN were fussing about their husbands over tea one day.

“I do wish my Leroy would stop biting his nails. That habit really bothers me!” the first one said.

“Oh, my Elmer used to do the same thing,” the other woman commented, “but I broke him of that habit real quick.”

“What did you do?”

“I hid his teeth.”

Lent is a time for change. Let's be honest; we all acquire bad habits over time. What once was perhaps an occasional mishap has now become part of our lifestyle. We know it is wrong, we know we need to change, but we may believe it is not possible. Lent is the time to take steps to turn away from the wrong and turn back to God. Desire it within yourself, and then do whatever it takes to get on the right path. Even if you have to hide your teeth.

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Father, this Lent I want to take seriously the call to repent. I know I can't have a complete overhaul, but I want to focus on one thing. I want to turn from my particular sin and turn to you. I know it won't be easy, but I ask for your grace to make it possible. I trust in you, Jesus. Amen.

Monday, First Week of Lent

The LORD said to Moses, “Speak to the whole Israelite community and tell them: Be holy, for I, the LORD, your God, am holy.” LEVITICUS 19:1-2

CHECK OUT THIS ACTUAL JOB AD:

“Any of the following will be grounds for immediate dismissal during the probationary period: coming in late or leaving early without prior permission; being unavailable at night or on the weekends; failing to meet any goals; giving unsolicited advice about how to run things; taking personal phone calls during work hours; gossiping; misusing company property, including surfing the Internet while at work; submission of poorly written materials; creating an atmosphere of complaint or argument; failing to respond to e-mails in a timely way; not showing an interest in other aspects of publishing beyond editorial; making repeated mistakes; violating company policies. DO NOT APPLY if you have a work history containing any of the above.”

This company means business. God, too, has high demands. We are to be holy as God is holy. Who of us fits the bill? Fortunately, God is forgiving. Striving to be holy as God is holy offers us a goal. We are not to be satisfied or complacent. We are to give all to Jesus. This Lent, discover where you need to grow.



Father, your demand may seem unrealistic—actually, impossible. Seeking holiness is our lifelong quest. We are not to give up; we are to do what we can and then trust that you, O God, will do the rest. May I seek to give myself totally to you. Amen.

Joyful steps

Father Thomas Connery provides the perfect blend of humor and reflection in this thought-provoking treasure designed especially for Lent. Always poignant and prayerful, funny and serious, his writings carry readers through the season, strengthening their relationship with the Lord as they travel ever closer to Easter. Allow Father Connery's wit and wisdom to help you, each and every day of Lent, gain a greater appreciation of Jesus' sacrifice for all, his passion and death, preparing you for the great joy of his resurrection at Easter.

This book, along with many other Creative Communications for the Parish products, is available on [amazon](#)kindle and [nook](#).