



WITH

grace
AND
gladness

STORIES *and* REFLECTIONS
for EACH DAY *of* LENT

Fr. Thomas J. Connery

ASH WEDNESDAY

Behold, now is a very acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation. **2 CORINTHIANS 6:2**

I CAME ACROSS THE HEART-TOUCHING SCENE while scrolling on Facebook:

“I kissed my dad on the forehead as he passed away in a small hospital bed. About 5 seconds after he passed, I realized it was the first time I had given him a kiss since I was a little boy.”



What have you put off? We live, at times, with the illusion that we have plenty of time. We believe that there will always be more opportunities to do the things we should do. Maybe we want to go back to school, get back in shape or spend more time with family members. But, before we realize it, the opportunity has passed. We may live with that same false belief about our relationship with God. We foolishly believe that we can live now as we please for there will be plenty of time to get our lives in order. That may not be the case. As St. Paul warns us, now is the time to act. This Lent, take a spiritual health inventory. Get your spiritual life in order. Don't put it off. There may not be a second chance.



Father, another Lent begins. I don't want to waste it. Help me put it to good use. Even one little step closer to you will make it all worthwhile. Thank you for this opportunity, and I pray that your Holy Spirit will lead me. Amen.

Consider what you will commit to do this Lent.

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

"HAS YOUR DIET CHANGED?" an 87-year-old woman was asked as she was being admitted into the hospital. "Yes," she said. "For Lent, I gave up whipped cream on my Jell-O, hard candy and my two beers a night." She then paused and said, "And look where it's gotten me!"

We don't like to sacrifice. We don't want self-denial. And we certainly don't like pain. We seek convenience and ease. It is our birthright, we feel. Jesus' words seem so out of touch in our self-involved world. Deny yourself? Pick up your cross? No thanks! We'd rather stay just as we are. However, if we do so, we will never experience the abundant life that Jesus wishes to give us. It sounds contradictory, but when we give something up, we gain something better—life with Jesus here and in the life to come. This Lent, remove whatever is keeping you from Jesus.

**This Lent,
remove
whatever is
keeping you
from Jesus.**



Father, I admit I am soft. I seek ease and comfort. I am not happy when it is cold, and I complain when it is too hot. I want life my way. Yet your son challenges us to pick up our cross. I admit that I don't want to, but I also believe it is the way to a fuller life. I know that if I do it, I will find my place in this world. I will find contentment. Most of all, I will be walking in your son Jesus' footsteps. I think now is the time that I will take that path. Help me with your grace. Amen.

What challenge is Jesus offering you to carry?

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

FIVE MILLION DOLLARS—that was the price for a mere 30-second commercial for Super Bowl LII. Every year, Super Bowl commercials end up being analyzed, rated and ranked. Many watch the Super Bowl not for the game, but for the commercials. You will notice spots from some of the world's biggest brands featuring A-list stars with top-notch production values, as well as commercials from attention-starved smaller companies. They all do it with the same hope of grabbing your attention. They are counting on your being distracted, overtired and overindulged. And it works.

So we may think that we have to be creative to get God to notice us. Isaiah offers us the secret as to how to grab our heavenly Father's attention. It is by caring for the less fortunate. Help feed the hungry, clothe the naked, assist the immigrant. When we do that, God will notice—"you shall cry for help, and he will say: Here I am!"



Father, thank you for this simple way of pleasing you. When we help the less fortunate, we are loving you. You promise us that you will be present to our needs if we are mindful of the needs of others. Help me to not be selfish or anxious for the future. I will bless others, for, in turn, you will care for me. Amen.

Whom can I help that is in need this Lent?



SATURDAY *after* ASH WEDNESDAY

Those who are healthy do not need a physician, but the sick do. LUKE 5:32

THE PREACHER SPENT HIS WHOLE SERMON relating the evils of sin and how all men are sinners with no exceptions. At the end of the sermon, he asked rhetorically, “Now does anyone here think they are without sin?”

He had only to wait a few seconds before a man in one of the back pews stood up. The pastor asked the man who had the audacity to stand after such a fiery sermon, “Sir, do you really think you are completely without sin?” The man quickly answered, “No sir, I’m not standing up for myself, but for my wife’s first husband.”

We are all sinners. I hope that does not come as a surprise. We make excuses. It is never our fault. We blame our parents, our teachers, our upbringing. The first step to change is to admit that you need to change. We are all in need of God’s grace. God is always ready to offer his grace. This Lent, take time to do a self-examination. See where you need help. Admit your sin. God is waiting for you.


**You only
want to heal
me. May I be
open to it.**




Father, though I know I am not perfect, I still convince myself that I am okay. I don't see myself as sick. Maybe I'll admit to having a low-grade fever, but nothing too serious. Grant me the grace to see myself as I really am—a sinner who needs your help. I have nothing to fear; you only want to heal me. May I be open to it. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

One day this week, do an examination of conscience.

First Sunday *of* Lent

He ate nothing during those days, and when they were over he was hungry. **LUKE 4:2**

A WOMAN IN A LOCAL DIET CLUB was lamenting that she had gained weight. She'd foolishly made her family's favorite cake, and they'd eaten half of it after dinner. The next day, she couldn't stop thinking of the other half until, finally, she cut a thin slice for herself. You know what happened next—one slice led to another and soon the whole cake was gone. The woman confessed to fellow members how disappointed she was with her lack of willpower. Worse yet, she dreaded her husband's reaction.

Everyone commiserated until someone inquired what her husband said when he had found out. The woman smiled mischievously. "He never found out. I made another cake and ate half!"

That is typical of how we handle our temptation—we give in. Jesus offers us a striking example of reliance on God's grace and not on one's own strength. Admittedly, fasting is not easy. Who likes discomfort? Fasting is necessary to purify ourselves physically and spiritually. Fasting is saying no to something good so we can say yes to something better.

This Lent, challenge yourself. Of course, be prudent and take care of your health. But fast from a meal, a favorite food or drink. Make that your prayer.



Father, Lent can seem so long and difficult, especially when I am giving up some food. Help me, for I know that fasting is a powerful weapon. I so want to put you and the spiritual life first in my priorities. When I am tempted, help me to say no. Be with me, for I want to grow closer to you. Amen.

What will you be giving up this Lent?

MONDAY, FIRST WEEK of LENT

Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me. **MATTHEW 25:40**

PERHAPS YOU MIGHT REMEMBER THIS COMMERCIAL. It ran some years ago showing a baby being born and then, in 30 seconds, the commercial races forward through the child's entire life until he is old and gray and bent over. Finally, he lets out a painful gasp and crashes headlong into a grave—dead. Then words flash across the screen: "Life is short. Play more Xbox."

Life is short, so how do you want to fill it? We are called to be holy. Matthew tells us how to put that into practice—by our love and care for the least fortunate. Life is not about accumulating or having a life of ease or comfort. As Christ's followers, we are called to serve, to live unselfishly.



Father, there are many opportunities to help others. Help me, I pray, to overcome my laziness and boredom. May I think of putting others first. May I help even in little, seemingly insignificant ways. When I do that, I am doing it to your son Jesus. In his name, I pray. Amen.

**This Lent, where can you give
of yourself to help others?
Remember, life is short.
Do it now.**



TUESDAY, FIRST WEEK of LENT

In praying, do not babble like the pagans, who think that they will be heard because of their many words. MATTHEW 6:7

IN HIS FASCINATING BOOK, *The Power of Habit*, Charles Duhigg reports that making your bed every morning is correlated with getting more done, feeling happier and being more financially responsible. Now, why would something as trivial as making your bed have any bearing on your success? Simple. Because starting your morning with an early win sets a positive tone for the rest of the day. It tells your brain that your environment is controllable.

So it is with prayer. Jesus teaches us that you do not have to say long, drawn-out prayers. Keep it simple. Talk to him from your heart. Simple prayers such as “Help me,” “Stay with me,” “Forgive me,” are very powerful. Such prayers remind us who really is in control—our Heavenly Father.

**May I honor
you by my
words, which
come from
my heart.**



Father, I am so glad that you do not require fancy prayers or impressive speeches. Simplicity and sincerity are what you desire. I can do that. I just have to speak from my heart. Thank you for making praying so simple. Now I just have to do it! May I honor you by my words, which come from my heart. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

Tonight, just talk to God from your heart.

WEDNESDAY, FIRST WEEK of LENT

The word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: “Set out for the great city of Nineveh, and announce to it the message that I will tell you.” JONAH 3:1

IN HIS BIOGRAPHY, Steve Jobs recounted how he invited John Scully to be CEO of his upstart company, Apple. At the time, Scully was president of Pepsi. He was doing quite well, making a handsome sum of money. Apple—not so much. Jobs went to Scully imploring him to join Apple, for he needed someone with Scully’s talent and expertise. Scully declined. He liked what he was doing. Undeterred, Jobs challenged Scully by asking him if he wanted to spend the rest of his life making sugar water or have the opportunity to change the world. Scully joined Apple.

Jonah had a mission. And not an easy one—tell the residents of Nineveh that God was going to destroy their city. Jonah reluctantly obeyed. The people repented, and God did not carry out his threat. Jonah fulfilled his mission. Lives were spared.

We all have a purpose. It may not seem important or noteworthy like Jonah’s, but in God’s plan, it matters. God uses all of us. It may be just to touch one individual who, in God’s eyes, is just as important as a huge city. Do you know why you are here? It is not by accident. God has a purpose for you. We, in turn, need to be obedient.



Father, I often think I don’t count. I am just ordinary me. Yet I know that you use ordinary people. I also know that you created me for a purpose. It may not appear spectacular, but it is essential. I am to do my part in this world. May I not look for fame or recognition, but may I seek only to do your will. That is enough for me. Amen.

Pray to know your purpose and pray for the grace to carry it out.

WITH grace AND gladness

Reminding us that we have a God-given purpose, that life is to be enjoyed and that God loves us, Father Thomas Connery helps readers to enjoy Lent with “Grace and Gladness!”

Yes, we make mistakes, but we will be forgiven. In these pages, we are reminded that God longs to forgive us and that we will be able to live more joy-filled lives by growing closer to God the entire season, on our way to an even more joy-filled Easter!

If you take the time each day for his stories, reflections and prayers, that are based on Scripture, Father Connery will have you laughing and praying your way through Lent.



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

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