

Living Lent
WITH
Laughter
AND
Love



FR. THOMAS J. CONNERY

ASH WEDNESDAY

*Even now, says the LORD,
return to me with your whole heart,
with fasting, and weeping, and mourning;
Rend your hearts, not your garments,
and return to the LORD, your God.*

JOEL 2:12-13

A pig and a chicken were walking down the road. As they passed a church, they noticed that a potluck charity breakfast was underway. Caught up in the spirit, the pig suggested to the chicken that they each make a contribution.

“Great idea!” the chicken cried. “Let’s offer them ham and eggs!”

“Not so fast,” said the pig. “For you, that’s just a contribution, but for me, it’s a total commitment!”

So what is your commitment? Are you all in this Lent, or does it end when you wash your ashes off of your forehead tonight? You don’t have to make drastic changes; just take consistent little steps. Ask yourself not what you want to do this Lent, but who do you want to become. Answer that question and take the steps necessary to see the change. Little steps can lead to big changes!



Dear Lord, I want to commit to change this Lent. I seek nothing drastic, but instead, just a step in the right direction. I want to be a consistent Christ follower. I want to be my better self. With your grace, I know it is possible. This Lent, I want to be all in. Help me, Jesus. Amen.

THURSDAY *after* ASH WEDNESDAY

What profit is there for one to gain the whole world yet lose or forfeit himself? **LUKE 9:25**

Check this out—\$160,000: The worth of the diamond that a UPS worker allegedly stole while unloading an airplane. \$20: The worth of the marijuana that the above idiot traded the \$160,000 diamond for. (*Reader's Digest*, June 2015.)

How foolish! Even more foolish is to live a life as if this is the only life that matters. We are here just for a moment, really. Life goes by so very quickly. This is not our home; we are just passing through. It is foolish to live a life that has no future. Live a life of generosity, a life of forgiveness and a life of prayer, for these are the things that have eternal value. There are no second chances in life. Live a life that matters!



Father, I sometimes get blinded by the things of this world. So much of my energy goes into making me comfortable and secure. Remind me that these things will not last. I am made for you and you alone. Let me live a life that reflects these values, for one day, I will spend eternity with you forever. Amen.

FRIDAY *after* ASH WEDNESDAY

*Sharing your bread with the hungry,
sheltering the oppressed and the homeless;
Clothing the naked when you see them,
and not turning your back on your own.
Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
and your wound shall quickly be healed.*

ISAIAH 58:7-8

“Has your diet changed?” I asked an 87-year-old woman I was admitting 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 paused and then said, “And look where it’s gotten me!”

Our Lenten sacrifices are not merely for own benefit so that we may feel holier. What we do for Lent should be a blessing for others, especially the less fortunate. Giving up some food and delicacy is a profitable discipline, but it should not stop there. We need to ask ourselves, “*What can I do to benefit the less fortunate?*” This is what is most pleasing to God.



Help me, Lord, during this time of Lent to take my eyes off of myself. May I not be the focus of my prayers and sacrifices. May I look to see how I can serve others. I want to bless them, for I know that is pleasing in your sight. Grant me the grace to recognize these opportunities. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

SATURDAY *after* ASH WEDNESDAY

*If you call the sabbath a delight,
and the LORD's holy day honorable.*

ISAIAH 58:13

Names are interesting. A woman named Jewell and her husband Myron bought a computer program with a spell-check function, which they decided to try. Jewell typed in her name, J-e-w-e-l-l, and the computer suggested the correction J-e-w-e-l, without the final "l."

"You don't know how to spell your own name," her husband said, laughing, as he typed in his name, M-y-r-o-n. No such word, according to the computer. It suggested "Moron."

How do you spell Sabbath? S-u-n-d-a-y ? The spelling is not as important as how we keep the Lord's day. Times have changed, and in many ways, Sundays are like any other day. It is a day to squeeze in more work or to go shopping. Sabbath is God's gift to us. Instead of running ourselves ragged, God ordains that one day a week should be a day of rest and relaxation. It is a day to spend with family, friends and with God. I am not going to dictate what is permissible and what is not. Sabbath is a mindset. I free myself from all that binds me. I rest in God's providential care for me.



Father, as much as I complain about life being too busy and too hectic, I thrive on it. It gives me meaning and purpose. When I am busy, I feel that I am important and worthwhile. Help me get off this wild chase and realize that my true worth lies in belonging to you. You are in control, and my life is in your hands. May I rest in that assurance. Help me to slow down. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

FIRST SUNDAY *of* LENT

At that time Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. MATTHEW 4:1

A man walks into his doctor's office and says, "Doctor, I've eaten something that disagrees with me."

Suddenly, a voice from the man's stomach says, "No, you haven't!"

In today's gospel, Jesus confronts the devil. The devil tempts him with three scenarios. And, admittedly, they all are enticing. But Jesus remains true to his calling. Jesus hadn't eaten for 40 days, and he was vulnerable. But he refused to give in to the lies. We, too, have that inner battle. Sometimes we have an ongoing argument with ourselves. Saying no to temptation is not easy. At those moments, turn to God in prayer: "*Jesus I trust in you.*"



Father, I am weak. I give in to temptation. No matter how often I say that this is the last time, it never is. Help me to not get discouraged and give up. In those difficult moments, I will pray to your son, Jesus, asking for his help. If nothing else, I will run from the temptation. I want to change this Lent. With your grace, may it be so. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

MONDAY, FIRST WEEK of LENT

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

While a third-grade class was completing a writing exercise, one of the students asked the teacher how to spell “piranha.” The teacher told the student that she was unsure. To her delight, the young student went to the dictionary to solve his problem.

That’s when she overheard another pupil say to him, “Why bother to look it up? She doesn’t know how to spell it anyway.”

Truthfully, who strives to be holy? Mostly, we settle. We see what is happening in the world and rationalize that we are better than most. Holiness? Well, that’s for those living in a monastery, we often think. But God’s invitation is for all of us. We are to be holy. Holy does not mean perfect, nor does it mean having the ability to perform miracles. It is simply wanting to live a life of obedience. We are holy when we want only what God wants. Don’t settle—set your sights high!



Father, holiness seems so out of reach. I can’t even get out of bed on time! But I do want to be happy. And happiness comes from acting according to your will. Let me not settle. Let me strive to live a life that pleases you. It is the surest path to happiness, both here and beyond. Amen.

TUESDAY, FIRST WEEK *of* LENT

Jesus said to his disciples: "In praying, do not babble like the pagans, who think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them. Your Father knows what you need before you ask him." **MATTHEW 6:7-8**

Eight-year-old Nina brought her report card home from school. Her marks were good (mostly As and a couple of Bs). However, her teacher had written across the bottom: "Nina is a smart little girl, but she has one fault. She talks too much in school. I have an idea I am going to try, which I think may break her of the habit."

Nina's dad signed her report card, putting a note on the back: "Please let me know if your idea works on Nina because I would like to try it out on her mother."

Our prayer should be simple. God is not impressed by the volume of our words but by our sincerity. We don't have to wear God down so that, finally, he gives in. Our Father loves us and wants only the best for us. We just have to speak from our heart as a child speaks to her father or mother. Keep it simple.



Father, I tend to think that when it comes to prayer, more is better. I imagine you are in heaven keeping count and are impressed by the number of my prayers. Help me to trust you enough to know that you are not impressed by the number of prayers. You just want me to pray from my heart. Receive my simple prayers that come as from the heart of a trusting child. I pray in the name of Jesus, your son. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, FIRST WEEK *of* LENT

When God saw by their actions how they turned from their evil way, he repented of the evil that he had threatened to do to them; he did not carry it out. JONAH 3:10

A five-dollar bill and a note was left by this neighbor's door. The note read as follows: "I am sorry that we stold your wind chime. Our mom died and liked butterflies so my sister took it to put by our window. I am sorry this is only money I have please do not be mad at us."

The little boy may not be the best speller, but he has the perfect heart. He has a contrite heart that seeks forgiveness. How can you refuse? God's heart is even bigger. He does not delight in punishing us, but only wants what is best for us. If we just offer some contrition, if we just ask for forgiveness, God can't help but forgive us. Don't wait! Turn to God and seek his mercy.



Father, I have sinned, and I have sinned often. I am ashamed and embarrassed. I am afraid to approach you. I think that if I can't forgive myself, how can you? But you can and you will! Father, you just want us to ask for forgiveness. This Lent, I will return to you. I will say I am sorry and make a firm resolution to avoid this sin in the future. It won't be easy, but with your grace, I can do it. I pray in Jesus' healing name. Amen.

EASTER SUNDAY

When Christ your life appears, then you too will appear with him in glory. **COLOSSIANS 3:4**

“Do you believe in life after death?” the boss asked one of his employees.

“Yes, sir,” the new recruit replied.

“Oh, well that’s okay then!” said the boss. “Because after you left early yesterday to go to your grandmother’s funeral, she stopped in to see you!”

That is the crucial question: *Do you believe in life after death?* We may not be scholars of the law or grasp all that is in the catechism, but we can know the most important fact—Jesus died and rose from the dead. The members of the early Church gave their lives for that truth. People don’t willingly die for a rumor or a hoax. Jesus died and rose. And if we believe in him, we, too, can have eternal life. May we not only believe that, but live it! He is risen! Alleluia!



Thank you, Jesus, for this eternal gift. No matter what life may have in store for me, I know that I can live forever with you. Jesus, thank you so much for dying for me; I pray that I may live for you. Amen.

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