



LENT
DEVOTIONS

STEADFAST
LOVE

INSPIRATION FROM
HENRI J. M. NOUWEN

Ash Wednesday

THE HEART OF GOD

On that day you will ask in my name. I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God.

John 16:26-27

Prayer takes place where heart speaks to heart, that is, where the heart of God is united with the heart that prays. Thus knowing God becomes loving God, just as being known by God is being loved by God. (Behold the Beauty of the Lord, 22-23)

Dear God, let us love you with all our hearts, just as you love us with all your heart. Amen.

Thursday after Ash Wednesday

BECOMING FLESH

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

John 1:14

Dear Lord Jesus, you, the eternal Word, through whom all things came into being, you became flesh among us so that you could speak with us, walk with us, pray with us, yes even die with us. You became a human being among other human beings so that nothing human would be alien to you, so that in everything, except sin, you could be like us. (Heart Speaks to Heart, 19)

Lord, you became like us that we might receive your grace. Amen.

Friday after Ash Wednesday

ALERT LIVING

Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.

Luke 21:36

“Standing with confidence before the Son of Man” no longer just refers to the end of time, but opens for me the possibility of living confidently, that is, with trust (the literal meaning of confide) in the midst of hostility and violence. (Behold the Beauty of the Lord, 27)

“What is this world coming to?” I don’t know how often I’ve said those very words. It seems that every day there’s something new in the news or in my personal life that causes me to lose sleep or pressures me to give up on humanity. All the more reason to take Jesus seriously when he says, “Be alert at all times.” He’s not so much warning us to watch out for the bad in the world around us, but rather, he’s reminding us what really matters. Namely, that the real life-giving question is not “What is this world coming to?” but “Who came into this world for us?” That’s what I believe makes for a life that is filled with the possibility of living confidently, trusting that in all things, God will guide our every step in every day.

Dear Lord, you came to seek and save the lost, and to rescue all of us from sin, death, the devil and despair. Help me to live confidently right now in that glorious truth. Amen.

Saturday after Ash Wednesday

PROVEN LOVE

But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

Romans 5:8

A human being is not someone who once in a while makes a mistake, and God is not someone who now and then forgives. No! Human beings are sinners and God is love. The conversion experience makes this obvious with stunning simplicity and disarming clarity. (With Open Hands, 84)

I think I will forever struggle with this conundrum: I am a sinner, but God, Almighty God, loves me anyway. Yet while I struggle, God goes all out to prove his love by letting his Son Jesus lay out the truth of his love in dying.

It's as if God is saying, "Yes, yes, I know you're a sinner; you've told me that a thousand times. But when are you going to hear me when I say it's not all about you—it's about Jesus. Jesus came to prove my love, and he did it with a cross."

I suspect that I will always in some way wrestle with the idea that God could really love me, as the hymn says, "Just as I am without one plea." But in my head and heart, I still keep hearing Jesus saying, "I love you, I forgive you, and that's that."

Dear God, help me to rejoice and believe that when the devil accuses me, I can send him to the cross, for that's where my sins are. Amen.

First Sunday of Lent

THE LAMB OF GOD

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”

John 1:29

You, dear Lord, holy, spotless, innocent Lamb, are the only one who can truly offer a sacrifice to God and so enter into the heavenly sanctuary where you want to bring me with you into the presence of your Father. (Heart Speaks to Heart, 41)

How do you suppose John knew who Jesus was, the “Lamb of God”? Was it in the way Jesus walked with a steady confidence heading in John’s direction? Or maybe it was the way Jesus looked at John with eyes of understanding and love ... the way he looks at us.

Nevertheless, John knew it was time for his disciples to take their eyes off him and put their eyes on Jesus, who would take away the sin of the world. What John told his disciples to do seems critically important for us still today, namely, focus on the One that really matters in this life: “The Lamb of God,” Jesus.

Jesus, the “Good Shepherd,” comes to fill our hearts with faith to see what John saw, so that we begin to follow Jesus into the heavenly sanctuary of our Heavenly Father.

Lord, help me to see Jesus with eyes of faith as John did, and open my heart to believe that you truly are the Savior I’ve been waiting for. Amen.

Monday, the First Week of Lent

ON TRIAL

He was oppressed,
and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.

Isaiah 53:7

Jesus undergoes it all. The time of action is past. He does not speak anymore; he does not protest; he does not reproach or admonish. He has become a victim. He no longer acts, but is acted upon. He has entered his passion. (Walk With Jesus, 16)

It's difficult for me to envision what all took place at Jesus' trial. He is beaten, whipped, spit upon, lied to and about, and yet "he did not open his mouth." Had it been me, I would have been kicking and screaming, "You have the wrong man! I want a lawyer!"

Well, they did have the wrong man. It should have been me on trial that day. It should have been me being slapped, whipped and beaten. It should have been me crucified on that hill Friday night. Instead it was Jesus who looks down from the cross and, when he finally does open his mouth to speak, tells me he loves me. "Father, forgive him," he says. And I believe him.

Now it's my turn to open my mouth and tell his story.

Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise (Psalm 51:15). I give you endless thanks for your mercy that goes on forever. Amen.

Tuesday, the First Week of Lent

GRAB HOLD

Though we stumble, we shall not fall headlong, for the LORD holds us by the hand.

Psalm 37:24

Jesus suffered this with us as he fell. He calls us now to trust that both his and our falling are a true part of the way of the cross. Maybe all that we can do when we fall is to remember that Jesus fell and is falling now with us. (Walk With Jesus, 47)

I'm not all that steady on my feet these days. I know I'm getting old. I find that often I have to grab hold of things to keep my balance. I used to go walking until I discovered the ruts along the walkway seemed to be reaching out to trip me up. Or maybe the ruts are less to blame than my own willingness to admit I need help. I use a cane these days when I go out. I also lean on Jesus more as my physical limitations have reminded me how much I need my Savior.

My legs may not be as strong as they once were and the cane sometimes slips out from under me, but even with all that, I still have Jesus. He's always there to catch me with his grace and forgiveness.

Take my hand, dear Lord; take my heart as well. And when the time is right, take whatever's left. I give my everything to you forever. Amen.

Wednesday, the First Week of Lent

WEEPING FOR US

But Jesus turned to them and said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.”

Luke 23:28

If we want to mourn for Jesus, we have to mourn for the suffering humanity that Jesus came to heal. If we are truly sad because of the suffering and pain which he suffered, we will include in our sadness all of the men, women, and children who suffer in our present world. (Walk With Jesus, 52)

When was the last time you laughed? I mean laughed so hard tears came to your eyes and you thought you would never stop laughing. Here’s another question: When was the last time you wept? I don’t mean teared up; I mean really and truly wept to the point where your stomach hurt and your heart ached and you thought, “When will it ever stop?”

I think sometimes Jesus must look at our world and weep. I think Jesus says to you and me, “Do you see what’s happening all around you? Do you see the neighbor next door sitting alone on the front porch? Do you listen to the news and hear my voice asking you to feel the pain of others as you weep and pray for them?”

I remember how Jesus cried out from the cross for his Father ... and for me.

Lord Jesus, you once said that “if you reach out to care for others, you’re reaching out to me.” Lord, let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me. Amen.

Thursday, the First Week of Lent

POURED OUT

While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”

Matthew 26:26-28

In the Eucharist, Jesus gives all. The bread is not simply a sign of his desire to become our food; the cup is not just a sign of his willingness to be our drink. Bread and wine become his body and blood in the giving. (With Burning Hearts, 68)

As I kneel at the altar waiting for the pastor to come my way, I often fidget. I know he’s getting close, and before long, he will say, “Take, eat; this is my body. This is my blood, given for you.” Those are not just the pastor’s words, those are Jesus’ words, and when I look into the pastor’s eyes at that moment, I see Jesus and I know he sees me.

I recall visiting the nursing home where my mother spent her last months and days. She was lying still in a sleep state, no longer even able to open her eyes. Yet I remember nurses coming to feed her and quietly saying, “Here now. This is for you.” Then she would open her lips and sip by sip she would take it in, and I would remember Jesus.

Dear Lord Jesus, before you left this earth, you left behind the gift that keeps on giving: your Body and your Blood. You gave it even to me. I thank you with all my heart. Amen.

STEADFAST LOVE



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Henri Nouwen was one of the most innovative and influential spiritual writers of the past century. His vision of spirituality was broad and inclusive, and his compassion embraced all of humankind. Nouwen wrote 39 books on spirituality and the spiritual life that have sold millions of copies and been translated into over 30 languages. The passages quoted in this booklet are taken from certain of his published works, listed here, all of which are available through www.henrinouwen.org.

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