

“Some years we approach our Lenten disciplines with a sense of enthusiasm; we’re ready for the challenge of the desert; we know we will emerge stronger for our time spent thirsting, climbing, and stepping forward in faith. In other years, we may look at Lent with wary eyes, all too familiar with the weight of our faults, and daunted by the bright empty heat into which we must carry them, until we find Jesus, to whom they may be surrendered. Whether you are anticipating Lent as an adventure to be embraced or as a scorching sojourn made in heat and light, *Not by Bread Alone* is the perfectly balanced Lenten companion for your daily contemplation. Mary DeTurrís Poust has a peculiar gift for finding the common experiences with which we can all identify and rendering them into profound meditations that are both consoling and instructive—the perfect assist through a season of wandering and hope.”

—Elizabeth Scalia, author of *Strange Gods: Unmasking the Idols in Everyday Life and Little Sins Mean a Lot*

“If you have ever fallen short of your Lenten resolutions, take this book with you wherever you go this Lent! Whether waiting at a doctor’s office, silently sitting outdoors during your lunch break, or deliberately spending time with Jesus at Adoration, Mary DeTurrís Poust’s insightful words in *Not by Bread Alone* will walk you through each day’s Scripture readings, helping you reflect and meditate on the graces waiting for you during this beautiful season of Lent. Day by day, moment-by-moment, this Lent can, and will, be different.”

—María Ruiz Scaperlanda is an award-winning author, including, *The Shepherd Who Didn’t Run: Fr. Stanley Rother, Martyr from Oklahoma* and *Rosemary Nyirumbe: Sewing Hope in Uganda*

Not by Bread Alone

Daily Reflections for Lent 2019

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Introduction

At Mass one morning, a little boy sitting in the second pew with his grandmother pointed to the Stations of the Cross hanging nearby, specifically the ninth station, Jesus falls a third time. A look of confusion and concern came across his face and he furrowed his brow, as he tried to decipher what was going on in that scene. Finally, he said, “He’s crying. He’s crying.” Although most of us were focused on how adorable this little boy was, I found myself looking back over my shoulder at the station to see what he saw: Jesus on the ground, the weight of the cross on his shoulder, a Roman soldier towering over him. This is the journey we are about to begin as we stand on the threshold of Lent today.

The road to Calvary over these forty days will be marked by confusion and concern, sadness, and, yes, even moments of joy—not the passing happiness we think of when we hear the word but pure joy, the kind that resides in our hearts when we put our trust in Jesus. The stories that mark our path from here until Easter are powerful and familiar, sometimes so familiar they fail to move us, or, more accurately, we fail to be moved. We’ve heard it all before. There’s nothing new here. Ah, but God makes all things new, and the Scriptures are alive with the Spirit, who blows through the ancient texts to make a word, a phrase, a scene jump out at the exact moment we need it, if only we’d settle down and pay attention.

We need reminders, someone or something to point out what we’re missing. Lent is that reminder, affording us the

time and space to go deeper, to sit with stories and let them speak to us as if for the first time. What is calling you to transformation? What speaks to your heart?

On that recent morning in church, in the pew in front of the precocious little boy, was an old man, hunched with age and held up on one side by a younger man, his son, perhaps. The older man was dressed in a beautiful suit, his Sunday best. He stood for every prayer, even though he struggled to make even the slightest move, and his son patiently helped him up and down. It was a beautiful moment, this juxtaposition of young and old, boundless curiosity and fading youth, but with faith and grace swirling around both, around all. Taking in the whole scene that morning, I was moved by the reality of so many people from so many places with so many stories, all hungry for one thing: an encounter with the Divine. The same could be said of our Lenten journey.

We walk this journey together, even if we think we are walking alone. Faith and grace bind us to each other and to our God, and that is the stuff of which pure joy is made. Begin down the path today, and, if you get sidetracked, dust yourself off and begin again, knowing that you have companions, seen and unseen, lifting you up, a communion of saints, in which we all get to stake our claim. Stop, look, listen. Joy is hiding in plain sight, even on the road to Calvary, even on the cross, because joy is not fleeting, joy is not a feeling; joy is the knowledge that we have been saved by Jesus Christ, who invites us to join him on the Way today. Let us begin . . .

Reflections

A Spiritual Tattoo

Readings: Joel 2:12-18; 2 Cor 5:20–6:2; Matt 6:1-6, 16-18

Scripture:

Rend your hearts, not your garments . . . (Joel 2:13)

Reflection: What is it about Ash Wednesday that resonates so deeply with people that even those who have been away from church feel compelled to return and be reminded of their own mortality in the form of an ashen cross? It's more than just ritual or obligation, I think. It's primal—a spiritual practice that brings us back to our very core, that pulls us away from the worldly concerns that typically occupy our time and forces us to face the truth we so often want to avoid: We are dust, and to dust we shall return.

Today, marked with a somber sign of our faith, we go out into the world and bear witness to our broken humanity for all to see. The cross on our forehead is meant to leave a lasting imprint deep within, like a spiritual tattoo that will linger long after we complete this forty-day course correction known as Lent. For us to have any hope of coming out the other side renewed and reborn, change cannot be only skin deep. “Rend your hearts, not your garments,” we are reminded in the first reading. The sacrifices and prayers of the season help us clear a path, but we can't stop there, not if we want to experience real transformation. God wants nothing

less than our hearts broken open so that he might find a resting place within and make us whole. Yes, the exterior practices are important, but what matters most is what happens unseen within our hearts and souls.

Meditation: What spiritual plans have you made for Lent? Are they more focused on outward sacrifices or inward change? While the former is challenging, the latter can be downright intimidating. And yet, that is what we are called to do. What one thing can you do over the course of the next few weeks that might create a permanent change in your life? What would make you whole? Use the sacrifices and prayers of this season to open your heart, mind, and soul to what God has in store for you.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, guide us in right ways as we begin our Lenten journey. Give us the courage to allow ourselves to be transformed by your love. Help us to use our Lenten sacrifices to dig deep into our spiritual center and carve out a space for you alone.

Where Our Crosses Lead

Readings: Deut 30:15-20; Luke 9:22-25

Scripture:

If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. (Luke 9:23)

Reflection: If you've ever been on the receiving end of a really good sales pitch, you know how hard it can be to say no. A good salesperson can make you feel like you're just plain crazy for passing up the deal they have to offer. That is what makes today's gospel so fascinating. If ever you thought the people of Jesus' time followed him because they expected some fabulous perks, this passage would dispel that notion pretty quickly. Deny ourselves? Daily crosses? With a sales pitch like that, it's a wonder Jesus had any disciples at all. But there they were, and here we are, following Jesus, despite the dire warnings and our all-too-human preference for avoiding suffering at all costs.

We probably don't have to look too deeply into our own lives to see the crosses we'd rather not have to bear. The illness that can't be cured, the job that's cut, the marriage that falls apart, the child lost to addiction, any and all of it can find its way into our lives when we least expect it. Even the seemingly minor crosses can wear us down over time and make us wonder if God has forgotten about us along the way.

But wrapped up in Jesus' pitch is an offer we really can't refuse: eternal life. The folks gathered around Jesus couldn't know what was coming after Good Friday, but we do. With 20/20 hindsight, we can see where our crosses lead.

Meditation: Is there a cross in your life that is wearing you out or leaving you feeling alone? Can you turn it over to God? What first step can you take? Maybe it's as simple as telling yourself that for the next fifteen minutes you will not try to control the outcome of anything. Just sit and be present. Maybe it's the difficult challenge of asking someone for help, or for forgiveness. The crosses will inevitably come; we can choose what we do with them.

Prayer: Jesus, Son of God, you knew what it meant to suffer just as we do, in ways we can't imagine. Give us the strength to carry the crosses that cast shadows across our lives and to find meaning in the suffering and graces that flow from the knowledge that we are not alone in our struggles, that you are with us always, until the end of time.