

Not by Bread Alone

Daily Reflections for Lent 2022

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Introduction

Lent is about one simple thing: turning to Jesus Christ, and him crucified (1 Cor 2:2). Lent is our time to journey with Christ, to set our own faces to Jerusalem and accompany him to the cross (Luke 9:51). Lent is our time to be with the crucified Lord, and to wait quietly with him for the brilliance of resurrection.

And yet, Lent is more than a solitary walk with Jesus. We do not walk this road to the cross alone. We walk as Church. We walk as people of God, as the Body of Christ (1 Cor 12:27). Yes, everything we do as we travel this road is with and for one another. This is what it means to follow Christ, to witness his death, to be conformed to him and his way of love that the cross embodies. It means to recognize that we belong to each other, that we must also lay down our lives for one another. We learn this at the foot of the cross, and we take it with us into the bright light of Easter.

As a pilgrim Church, we look to the daily Liturgy of the Word as a rich resource to nourish us on our Lenten journey. The book in your hands contains reflections, meditations, and prayers inspired by these daily Scripture readings. As you read and pray with this book each day, you will hear two distinct voices—one a Jesuit priest, the other a married mother of four—voices of two friends and colleagues whose different walks of life intersect in a mutual love of God's word and a shared desire to explore that word with others.

Each day, you will find that one of us has written a reflection, and the other has responded with a meditation and prayer. It is our hope that this ongoing conversation, this daily mixing of voices and perspectives, has enriched our presentation and will draw you into the journey with us. We have been blessed by writing together for you, learning from one another and praying for one another along the way.

Lent is upon us. What will we do with this time, this holy season? Will it be like other Lents, or will it be different? How will we focus our minds and hearts to make the most of this sacred time?

Lent is here. Let's embark on this journey together.

Amy Ekeh
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Reflections

Practicing the Faith

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

Scripture:

Behold, now is a very acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation. (2 Cor 6:2)

Reflection: My first memory, as a school kid, of receiving ashes from our parish priest is still vivid. His thumb pressed a generous amount on my forehead; several particles fell like dust before my eyes. What I recall most are the words he prayed, so haunting to my young ears: “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” Those words certainly got my attention. Return to dust?!?

So, too, do some lines from our readings grab our attention. Joel’s exhortations ring out with a sense of urgency: “Blow the trumpet in Zion! Proclaim a fast, call an assembly.” Paul urges the Corinthians to recognize the importance of the moment: “*now* is the day of salvation”!

It’s appropriate that Ash Wednesday grabs our attention so dramatically. Today we embark on our annual Lenten journey in preparation for celebrating the sacred events of our salvation—Jesus’ self-offering in love, his resurrection, and the outpouring of the Spirit.

Today’s Gospel reading sets forth the traditional Lenten practices: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. These practices

are tried and true, though we should keep their true purposes in mind. *Prayer*: let's set aside more time in quiet to listen to God's word, to heed the Spirit's presence and promptings. *Fasting*: let's reflect honestly on the various ways we attempt to satisfy ourselves, and open spaces within so that God can fill us with what truly satisfies. *Almsgiving*: let's give thanks for the many ways God has been generous to us and imitate that generosity toward those in need.

Now is the time to practice our faith afresh. We will have much to celebrate at journey's end.

—TS

Meditation: Today is a day of both penitence and joy. We pause to recognize our sinfulness and our need to repent. At the same time, we are so proud to be marked with the cross. This mark is not shameful; it is our identity. We belong to Christ, and he to us. How will we proclaim that identity this Lent, when the ashes have fallen away?

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, be with us every step of the way as we take up this Lenten journey.

—AE

It's Our Choice

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

Scripture:

Moses said to the people: “Today I have set before you life and prosperity, death and doom.” (Deut 30:15)

Reflection: My friend Paula’s young son is prematurely wise. He has a way of looking her in the eye, laying a calm hand on her shoulder, and matter-of-factly delivering fantastic words to live by. One of Nick’s proverbs that we repeat around our house is: “*You always have a choice.*” It reminds me of something an old Cistercian professor once told me: “The whole universe could blow up in your face—you could still be saying no.”

The power of human free will is astounding. We *always* have a choice. Today’s reading from the ancient book of Deuteronomy reminds us of this. Moses tells Israel—faithful, faltering Israel—that a clear choice lies before them: life or death, blessing or curse. For Moses the choice is simple and straightforward: to choose life is to love God, to listen to God, to “hold fast” to God (Deut 30:20). This is the way of blessing.

Of course, we know that in our day-to-day lives these choices are not always so clear. How do we love? How do

we listen? How do we hold fast? How do we, as Moses instructs, choose life?

The answers to these questions may not be clear in every circumstance of our lives, but there's beauty and merit in asking them. And there is tremendous value in remembering our own power—our power to choose. God was never interested in automatons or a people coerced into loving him. God only wants our love if it is freely given.

We always have a choice.

—AE

Meditation: The freedom to choose can, at times, lead to paralysis—especially when there are so many options. It can also be a burden, as some choices have significant consequences attached to them. But just imagine if we weren't free to choose. That freedom is a gift from God who, in his love for us, invites us to respond, in big choices and small, with love.

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for the gift of our dignity to choose. Help me, as I begin this Lenten journey, to be aware of all the choices I make. Inspire me to choose the way of life—for my own sake and for the sake of all whom I encounter.

—TS