



# LENT

*A TIME OF MERCY AND GRACE*

FROM  **Franciscan Media**

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# ASH WEDNESDAY

Pope Francis has made mercy one of his greatest hallmarks. It's no surprise, then, that he declared a special year dedicated to the contemplation of mercy. Pope Francis wants us to realize that God's mercy and grace surround us not just in special times and places, but always and everywhere. This special year is a time to discover the extraordinary in the ordinary, to be surprised by God's mercy when we least expect it.

During Lent, we're encouraged to reflect on the concepts of judgment, justice, forgiveness, and mercy. Holy Week brings us to contemplation of the cross of Christ, a powerful meditation on the depths of divine mercy.

## **Ash Wednesday—*Be Faithful to the Gospel***

Joel 2:12–18; 2 Corinthians 5:20—6:2; Matthew 6:1–6, 16–18

The prophet Joel calls for a public ritual of repentance. Jesus reminds his followers that our deepest need is between ourselves and the Father. Both are necessary. Which do you need this Lent?

## **Thursday After Ash Wednesday—*Choose Life***

Deuteronomy 30:15–20; Luke 9:22–25

Moses tells the people: “I set before you life and death. Choose life.” In so many ways, different for each of us, this is still a choice we have to make. Perhaps this is what it means to take up our cross.

## **Friday After Ash Wednesday—*The Fast God Wants***

Isaiah 58:1–9a; Matthew 9:14–15

Isaiah is clear about what God wants from us: feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, not turning our backs on those in need. This Year of Mercy will remind us of all the ways God has been merciful to us. How can we show that mercy to others? How will you show mercy today?

## **Saturday After Ash Wednesday—*We're All Sinners***

Isaiah 58:9b–14; Luke 5:27–32

Pope Francis often tells us that he is no less a sinner than the rest of us. This isn't pious sentiment. He offers actual examples of his own sins. We run from admitting that we're not perfect. Lent calls us back to seeing that God loves us as we are and wants to heal us.

# FIRST WEEK OF LENT

## Sunday—*Wrestling with Temptation*

Deuteronomy 26:4–10; Romans 10:8–13;  
Luke 4:1–13

Our temptations aren't likely to come to us from a mysterious figure in a deserted place. But often they revolve around the same basic human drives: hunger, emotional security, safety, status, ambition.

## Monday—*The Least of These*

Leviticus 19:1–2, 11–18; Matthew 25:31–46

In the parable of the sheep and the goats, Jesus outlines for us the actions that have come to be known as the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Make a list of these and decide on several ways you can live them this Lent.

## Tuesday—*As We Forgive*

Isaiah 55:10–11; Matthew 6:7–15

If we don't understand God's mercy toward us, if we don't take time to reflect on the ways we have been forgiven, it will be hard to be merciful to others. And yet we set this as our goal each time we pray the Our Father: Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

## Wednesday—*Come Follow Me*

Jonah 3:1–10; Luke 11:29–32

Jonah seems to relish the thought of the destruction of Nineveh. And yet, the people of Nineveh surprised him when they did, in fact, repent. God surprised him even more when he had mercy on the people. When have you been surprised by an act of genuine repentance? How did you need to change your preconceived ideas as a result?

## Thursday—*The Gift of Alms*

Esther C:12, 14–16, 23–25; Matthew 7:7–12

Jesus challenges us to examine our beliefs about the Father. Again and again, Jesus shows that God is merciful, loving, waiting to give us everything that is good. Why do we sometimes cling to a belief that God only wants to punish us?

## Friday—*Be Reconciled*

Ezekiel 18:21–28; Matthew 5:20–26

Sometimes going to church and doing “holy things” is easier than the hard work of being reconciled to people in our families, people at work, people who rub us the wrong way. You know what you need to do. How are you going to do it?

## Saturday—*Doing the Unthinkable*

Deuteronomy 26:16–19; Matthew 5:43–48

“Love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you.” We don't want to hear these words of Jesus. Present-day examples of people not only hearing these words but living them draw scorn and derision, often from other Christians. Love and forgiveness can change the world.

# SECOND WEEK OF LENT

## Sunday—*Ordinary and Extraordinary*

Genesis 15:5–12, 17–18; Philippians 3:17–4:1; Luke 9:28b–36

Moments of transfiguration are rare, but when we experience them, they change everything we know about reality. Don't be distracted by the details of what Jesus experienced. Your own may surprise you by its seeming ordinariness. When has this happened for you? How is your life different because of it?

## Monday—*Don't Compare, Don't Judge*

Daniel 9:4b–10; Luke 6:36–38

Jesus reserved his harshest words in the Gospels for those who thought they were religiously and spiritually superior to others. As soon as we think we're better than someone else, we set ourselves up for a fall. When are you likely to do this? What might be a better response?

## Tuesday—*On Our Own*

Isaiah 1:10, 16–20; Matthew 23:1–12

It begins when toddlers learn the word “no” and continues throughout life in varying degrees—this separation from our earthly parents. It doesn't mean we don't love them. It means our God gives us our own way, our own spirit, our own destiny.

## Wednesday—*A Life of Service*

Jeremiah 18:18–20; Matthew 20:17–28

Jesus knows what lies ahead for him and it's not pleasant. His followers seem too absorbed in their own ambitions to hear what he's saying. We've been on both ends of situations like this. We might heed Jesus's words: “The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve.”

## Thursday—*Seeing the Invisible Ones*

Jeremiah 17:5–10; Luke 16:19–31

How often do we, like the rich man in today's Gospel, consistently ignore the beggars at our gates? Pope Francis shows us concrete ways to minister to the poor and the homeless. Don't just feel guilty today; take action!

## Friday—*Wanting What Others Have*

Genesis 37:3–4, 12–13a, 17b–28a; Matthew 21:33–43, 45–46

In both readings today, jealousy and envy are at the root of violent acts. This happens in varying degrees all around us. It's not limited to any one economic class or social status. Gratitude for what we have and mercy toward others will go a long way to keeping us right in God's eyes.

## Saturday—*Giving It All Away*

Micah 7:14–15, 18–20; Luke 15:1–3, 11–32

Most of us can identify with one of the two brothers in this familiar parable. We know what it's like to come to our senses and realize we've taken a wrong turn. Do we also know how to admit that maybe we're not as righteous as we think we are?

# THIRD WEEK OF LENT

## Sunday—*God's Plans for Us*

Exodus 3:1–8a, 13–15; 1 Corinthians 10:1–6, 10–12; Luke 13:1–9

The story of the fig tree is one of the perfect examples of God's mercy in the Gospels. Jesus, the caring gardener, works closely with us to nurture our best selves. And he often gives us more chances than we think we deserve.

## Monday—*Learning to Listen*

2 Kings 5:1–15a; Luke 4:24–30

Jesus accuses the people in his hometown of not recognizing the gifts he brings. This resonates with us because we sometimes feel dismissed by family or coworkers. But if we're honest, we dismiss others as well. Lent is a fine time to examine our attitudes toward everyone in our lives.

## Tuesday—*Forgive Again and Again*

Daniel 3:25, 34–43; Matthew 18:21–35

Peter's question is one that we ask ourselves more times than we might be willing to admit. "How often must I forgive?" Jesus is uncompromising in his response: as many times as necessary.

## Wednesday—*Cultivate a Peaceful Heart*

Deuteronomy 4:1, 5–9; Matthew 5:17–19

As Jesus begins the Sermon on the Mount, he makes it clear that he is going beyond the Law of Moses, but he is not replacing it. We might think of the Commandments as the minimum requirement and the Beatitudes as the more mature, deeper expression of the law God places in the human heart.

## Thursday—*Nothing to Defend*

Jeremiah 7:23–28; Luke 11:14–23

One of the most common attitudes that separates us from others is defensiveness. From international relations to religious denominations to our own schools, workplaces and families, we close ourselves off to keep from being hurt. It's difficult to let ourselves be open and vulnerable. We need to cultivate a belief that we're all part of the human family.

## Friday—*Love Brings Us Close to the Kingdom*

Hosea 14:2–10; Mark 2:28b–34

Today's Gospel is clear: love God, love others, love yourself. Jesus tells us this is the greatest commandment. If we do this, keeping the other commandments will fall into place with little effort.

## Saturday—*Holy Humility*

Hosea 6:1–6; Luke 18:9–14

Luke tells us, "Jesus addressed this parable to those who were convinced of their own righteousness and despised everyone else." We spend a great deal of energy comparing ourselves to others. Whether this makes us feel superior or inferior, it keeps us from being the person God has called us to be.

# FOURTH WEEK OF LENT

## Sunday—*Learning to See*

Joshua 5:9a, 10–12; 2 Corinthians 5:17–21;  
Luke 15:1–3, 11–32

In this Year of Mercy, the parable of the Prodigal Son is one of the best Gospel passages to bring home to us the image of the merciful Father. We see a man watching daily for his wayward younger son. He leaves the party to bring in his stubborn older son. God longs for us to come home, to be reconciled, to be embraced.

## Monday—*Signs and Wonders*

Isaiah 65:17–21; John 4:43–54

Often it is the outsider or those who are physically blind who see the truth before those who profess to have the answers to life's questions. Take time to test your spiritual vision today.

## Tuesday—*Do We Like Complaining?*

Ezekiel 47:1–9, 12; John 5:1–3a, 5–16

Not everyone wants to be well. Too often we become invested in our own weakness, our own sickness. It seems we would rather complain than deal with the responsibility of being healed. It can take a great deal of reflection, prayer, and good counsel to overcome this inertia.

## Wednesday—*The Virtue of Work*

Isaiah 49:8–15; John 5:17–30

As Jesus responds to those who question his identity as the Son of God, he puts it in terms of the work that God does in the world. From the beginning of creation, God's work keeps all the universe in existence. Jesus shares in that work. What part of the work are you sharing in this Lent?

## Thursday—*How Others See Us*

Exodus 32:7–14; John 5:31–47

As Jesus moves closer to his passion and death, his arguments with his critics become more heated. Jesus makes it clear that he's more interested in doing God's will than finding acceptance among the religious leaders. How strong are we when it comes to standing up for what we believe?

## Friday—*The Kingdom Is Right Here*

Wisdom 2:1a, 12–22; John 7:1–2, 10, 25–30

We like to think that the origins of our holy people are shrouded in mystery, in part because it allows us to set them apart as different from us. This gives us a built-in reason not to emulate them too closely. The incarnation turns this upside down. Suddenly, we discover that our God became one of us, precisely to show us how to live.

## Saturday—*Boundaries and Limitations*

Jeremiah 11:18–20; John 7:40–53

The Pharisees mean to insult Nicodemus when they ask if he, too, is from Galilee. We still do this today. We think we know how people will behave based on what part of the country they're from. We divide our own cities into good areas and bad areas. Take a chance on visiting a new part of town this week and see it with the eyes of Jesus.

# FIFTH WEEK OF LENT

## Sunday—*Great Compassion*

Isaiah 43:16–21; Philippians 3:8–14; John 8:1–11

The woman in today's Gospel knows that Jesus and the changes he brings are her only hope for something better. She has nothing to lose. Those who left hiding their guilt, who believed they had everything to lose, ultimately killed Jesus and rejected his law of compassion.

## Monday—*Life, Not Death, Is the Final Reality*

Kings 4:18–21; 32–37; John 11:1–45

We nod in understanding when Martha says to Jesus, "I know he will rise in the resurrection on the last day." Our minds and our faith tell us one thing, but our hearts and our bodies often balk at the appearance of separation and loss that, for a time, is all too real and unavoidable. Like so much of our spiritual lives, we learn to live with this paradox.

## Tuesday—*The Sign of the Cross*

Numbers 21:4–9; John 8:21–30

God tells Moses to make a bronze serpent, an image of the very thing that harmed the people. When they gaze on it, they will be healed. There's a deep truth to be found in confronting our inner wounds, trusting that, in God's time and care, the truth will bring healing. One place we might do that is before the cross that brought healing to the whole world.

## Wednesday—*Freedom in Truth*

Daniel 3:14–20, 91–92, 95; John 8:31–42

Today's readings give us both storytelling and theology. From the book of Daniel, we have the

story of the three young men rescued from the fiery furnace because of their staunch faith in God. In John's Gospel, Jesus offers a lofty argument to the religious leaders. The message of both is the same: God's truth will set you free.

## Thursday—*What Is Ours?*

Genesis 17:3–9; John 8:51–59

The people challenging Jesus rely on Abraham's historic relationship with God. They fail to see that they are being called to their own covenant of faith. How do we make the faith of our ancestors our own?

## Friday—*Praising God*

Jeremiah 20:10–13; John 10:31–42

If all we had were Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we might be persuaded that Jesus of Nazareth was simply a holy man who went about the countryside teaching, healing, and preaching a moral lifestyle. In John's Gospel, we have to wrestle with the fact that this good and holy man is, in fact, the human manifestation of the one, true God. And still he was rejected. Why do we find it so difficult to see the good in others?

## Saturday—*Worldly Power*

Ezekiel 37:21–28; John 11:45–57

The religious leaders are convinced that Jesus is threatening their worldly power. They fail to recognize that the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus will have a truly cosmic significance in God's plan of salvation. In what ways do we limit our awareness of God's design?

# HOLY WEEK

## **Palm Sunday—*The Cross Is Before Us***

Isaiah 50:4-7; Philippians 2:6-11; Luke 22:14—23:56

The cross is before us now with its wordless challenge to love beyond death. Take some time this week to think about events in your own life that have given you an experience of Jesus's command to pick up your cross and follow him.

## **Monday—*True Concern for the Poor***

Isaiah 42:1-7; John 12:1-11

Judas's question in today's Gospel can generate nearly endless debate about the role of almsgiving and charity in the Christian life. Judas, the keeper of the communal purse, can never see beyond the question of finances. For Jesus, the answer is always love.

## **Tuesday—*Love of Money***

Isaiah 49:1-6; John 13:21-33, 36-38

Jesus knows that he will be betrayed and he knows who his betrayer is. Yesterday, we heard Judas challenge him over the jar of ointment used to anoint him. Today, Jesus tells Judas to go about his errand. The other disciples assumed he was going to purchase something for the feast. Money is a necessary part of our lives. The Gospels remind us to keep it in its place.

## **Wednesday—*Betrayal***

Isaiah 50:4-9a; Matthew 26:14-25

Each of the Twelve questioned Jesus's prediction of betrayal: "Surely it is not I, Lord?" Each one may have suspected that he might be capable of it, that his faith wasn't as strong as it might be. Do we always end up betraying Jesus at some point? We are all sinners. We all need salvation, again

and again and again. And so we come to the paschal mystery, the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

## **Holy Thursday—*As I Have Done***

Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:1-5

Perhaps no action by Pope Francis has generated as much astonishment in the press as his washing the feet of prisoners—men, women, Christian, Muslim. A ritual that has, at times, become an honor for the elite once again returns to what Jesus intended: As I have done, so you must do.

## **Good Friday—*By Your Holy Cross***

Isaiah 52:13—53:12; Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9; John 18:1—19:42

*The Passion According to St. John* is always read on Good Friday. It gives us a perspective on the death of Jesus that reminds us that it wasn't simply a tragic occurrence in the life of a good man. It was the culmination of the earthly ministry of the Son of God, his hour of glorification, that moment when heaven and earth are joined and the life of Christ became the ongoing life of the Church.

## **Holy Saturday—*This Is the Night***

Genesis 1:1—2:2; Exodus 14:15—15:1 Romans 6:3-11; Luke 24:1-12

The Easter Vigil may be the grandest experience of liturgy in the Catholic Church. Through readings and chant, psalms and hymns, we relive the entire story of God's covenant with us, from the story of creation through the Exodus of the Hebrew people, to the resurrection of Jesus and into our own lives. During the Easter season, pay attention to the way God's plan is unfolding for you.



# EASTER SUNDAY

## Easter Sunday—*The Empty Tomb*

Acts 10:34a, 37–43; Colossians 3:1–4 or 1 Corinthians 5:6b–8; John 20:1–9

At the heart of the Easter story is the empty tomb. The stories of the appearances will come later, unfolding the mystery of the resurrection. But the first message to the apostles is that the tomb is empty. Somewhere in the darkness of our Easter Vigil, each of us must confront the empty tomb and discover for ourselves the Risen Christ.

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