

LENT
Companion
2025

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INTRODUCTION

BY MARK HART

Have you ever noticed how hard it is to give something up when you don't really want to do it? I mean, "giving up" food you don't really crave is a whole lot easier than going without the coffee drink that you love. How about "adding in things that are good for you"? Is more exercise really a big sacrifice for people who love to work out? No. Is reading the Bible harder when it means less screen time on your phone? For sure.

And that's where the challenge of Lent really comes in. If giving something up or "adding something in" doesn't hurt at least a little, is it really a sacrifice?

When I was a kid, Lent didn't mean a whole lot. It meant my mom ordered cheese pizza instead of pepperoni every Friday night. It meant that the music at Mass got more "serious," and we didn't say "the A word" (you know, Allelu...). It meant

that my dad gave up caffeine and my mom gave up sweets and, thus, there was little to no happiness in our home for several weeks.

So what really is the big deal with Lent, and what's the point of those sacrifices, anyway? It seems like many Catholics who "give things up" for Lent don't really know why and just proceed to make the rest of the world miserable.

The very word lent comes from the Anglo-Saxon word *lencten*, which basically means "spring." Why spring, you ask? Well, because spring is about death and life. Look at the trees and flowers in the season of spring, which have died and are now coming back to life. That's what Easter is about. The *death* of Good Friday and the *life* of Easter Sunday is what we call the Paschal Mystery — the fact that *in order to rise, we must first die*.

Lent is the Church's "spiritual wake up call" not only to help prepare us for Easter, but also to remind us that we need to die to ourselves. Dying to yourself means dying to your own selfish wants, pleasures, desires, etc. in order to better focus on what God wants for you. Think of Lent like a personal, spiritual reset and a great time to re-prioritize your life.

Consider these words from Scripture: “Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.” **(Hebrews 13:16)**

When we sacrifice anything during Lent — whether big or small, whether something we feel we “need” like caffeine or something we enjoy like sweets — it’s the “going without”... it’s the sacrifice that counts. The sacrifice isn’t meant to make us miserable, but rather to help us keep in mind what an incredible sacrifice God made for us on the cross. When we “add in” things like more time for prayer or reading (and less time on our screens), it helps us re-order our lives and keeps any false gods from taking too much of our time, energy, or attention.

In this Lent Companion you will be given reflections, Scripture passages, and challenges to read through and try. Many are quick and simple. Some are more difficult. It’d be easy to gloss right over the Gospel passages listed, but it’s far more meaningful to God and for your soul to take five minutes, open your Bible, and actually let God speak to you.

Ultimately, what you choose to do with this little book, God's big(ger) Book, and this Lent is really up to you. How far are you willing to go to grow in your faith? How much are you willing to sacrifice for the One who sacrificed it all for you? Your response to these questions will determine what kind of Lent — and Easter — you enjoy this year.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This Lent Companion is meant to be just that — a companion for you during your Lenten journey into the spiritual desert. If you're reading this book, you're obviously taking ownership of your spiritual growth; and this pleases God. Your spiritual life could change dramatically over the next several weeks if you allow the Holy Spirit to lead you.

The reflections and ideas within this booklet should serve as a starting point for Lent, not an ending point. You might find this companion most helpful if you journal daily, or weekly, as you go along. Journaling is simply a written record of your dialogue with God. When you journal as a form of prayer, you are expressing your thoughts (or more specifically, the movements of your heart) through writing instead of through speaking or silence.

There is no “right” or “wrong” way to journal — simply write what is on your heart. Over time you can go back to see what you’ve written on the pages (and later, the filled journals). You’ll be amazed not only at how your life and your perspective change over time but by how faithful God is to you, both daily and eternally. He will not let you down, ever. He is waiting for you. Go to Him in prayer. Scripture promises us, “Draw near to God and he will draw near to you.” **(James 4:8)**

Once you’ve spent some time in silence and in prayer, just start writing. You can journal as long or as briefly as you feel inspired to do so. Some days you might journal for an hour or more; other days you might write one sentence or nothing at all. The latter is no failure on your part. Any time you put yourself in the presence of God and listen is a success.

In addition to journaling, here are a few more ideas for “getting the most” out of each section in the Lent Companion:

Scripture Passages

Each Scripture passage in this companion is taken directly from the Sunday Gospels (proclaimed at Mass) for each week of Lent. Try to read and pray through the passage a few times prior to the upcoming Sunday Mass. You'll be amazed at how much more you get out of the liturgy this way. Make it a point as well to look for details, adjectives, and other descriptive words that bring the story to life. Underline key words or phrases that jump out at you, and write out any questions you may have so that you can find answers to them later. Remember that the Gospel stories aren't just nice tales of old. They are part of your history. The Gospels are your story of how much God loves you! Know them and cherish them as your own.

Reflections

Scripture readings are deep, especially during Lent, so there is a lot you can take away from each of them. The Sunday Gospel reflections in this companion are intended to help your brain and heart move in the same direction. After reading a reflection, spend some time journaling about what you read, as well as sharing your own thoughts with friends, family, or others in the Church. If you have a hard time relating to

a reflection right away, that's okay! Read the Gospel and the reflection again, and ask the Lord very specifically to speak to you through these inspired words.

The Way of the Cross Daily Challenges

Jesus invites us to follow Him on the Way of the Cross. One way we can do this is by praying the Stations of the Cross. Another way we can follow Him is by choosing to “die to ourselves” in one small way each day, like giving up something we want so that someone else can be blessed. In this Lent Companion, personal challenges are included for every day of the week to help you enter into the themes. They are designed to help you walk even closer with Jesus along the Way of the Cross.

Some challenges might need to be adapted to your specific age, vocation, or situation, so use them as practical ideas that you can implement and build upon. Along with an activity for you to do each day, each daily Mass Gospel reading is listed. Make sure to set aside time to go to daily Mass when you can; and when you can't, spend a few minutes in prayer with the day's Gospel reading. The Scripture passages laid out by the Church for Mass are a great way to walk with

Christ toward His Resurrection. Be intentional. Try to do something on each of these 40 days of Lent to enter more deeply into the season. It won't always be easy, but by choosing to die to yourself a little each day, you take one more step with Christ on the path to new life.

ASH WEDNESDAY

MARCH 5TH, 2025

Scripture Passage

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

Jesus said to his disciples: “Take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them; otherwise, you will have no recompense from your heavenly Father. When you give alms, do not blow a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets to win the praise of others. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing, so that your almsgiving may be secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you.

“When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners so that others may see them. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the

door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you.

“When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites. They neglect their appearance, so that they may appear to others to be fasting. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to be fasting, except to your Father who is hidden. And your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you.”

Reflection

Have you ever driven by the grand opening of a restaurant or shopping center? Oftentimes you'll see those giant moving spotlights out front, casting rays of blinding light into the night sky. The lights are designed to catch our attention, to announce something big, and to draw customers closer. Our human eyes are even more captivated by the mechanical lights shining up from earth than the natural light emanating down from the stars — stars that our ancestors called “the heavens.”

Our hearts are often drawn to the artificial “lights” that the world has to offer; we seek earthly solutions to our heavenly desires. Some people run to food and others to drugs. Some run to