

LENT COMPANION


 LIFE TEEN

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ONE LONG LENT

One year ago, the world rapidly changed. At the end of 2019 and into 2020, a global pandemic was beginning. By the start of Lent last year, the entire world shut down under the weight of a virus that few understood and all were powerless to stop. The season of Lent saw Masses no longer celebrated publicly, thousands of people dying, and the immediate shutdown of schools, activities, and what used to be the “normal” aspects of life.

Easter came without a Mass to attend and celebrate. In many ways, it felt like Lent never came to an end.

Yet, in the midst of every season and challenge there is resurrection and new life. So we find ourselves in Lent 2021 looking toward Easter again. The world has changed, but the profound and life-giving truth behind this season remains. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came in human flesh and walked among us. He experienced what we experienced — anxiety, joy, suffering, temptation, family, persecution, and eventually death. Jesus rose from the dead and through His death and Resurrection we are also invited to eternal life.

Death is not the end. Easter reminds us of that and Lent prepares our hearts by reminding us why we need a savior in the first place.

We repent from our sins — the word, “repent” meaning “to have a change of heart or mind” — and we choose to live in freedom. We fast so that we might not get too attached to worldly things and keep our hearts fixed on Christ. We give to others as a reminder that every gift we have is from God and is meant to be shared.

We pray. We pray in petition for what we need, in thanksgiving for what we have, and in intercession for others that need prayer. We adore the God that made us. Lent prepares our minds and hearts for Easter, and this year, we all need Easter.

Easter brings hope; a hope that all is not lost in our world. Easter brings promise; a promise that one day God will definitively wipe away every tear and remove every chain and oppression from us. Easter brings peace; a peace in the midst of uncertainty and trial.

As we begin Lent, a Lent that feels like it never came to an end, we look ahead to the promise of Easter and the resurrection it brings to each of us. To undertake the season is to enter into the promise and prepare our hearts to receive it.

HOW TO USE THIS LENT COMPANION

This Lent companion is meant to be used daily. There are reflections for every day of Lent, starting with Ash Wednesday and lasting through Holy Week. We even included a reflection for Easter Sunday.

Each day has three elements in it: There are citations for Scripture passages, a reflection on those passages, and then three daily challenges. Each day should take you between 15 and 20 minutes to pray. That isn't a lot of time; we spend that much time swiping through Instagram or Tik Tok (and probably more) every day.

Pick a time that you know you will remember to pray through the devotional of the day. If you are always rushing to get to school on time, trying to pray early in the morning probably isn't a good idea. If you are always exhausted right before you go to bed, waiting to pray at night probably won't work either. Be honest about when you can make the time (and focus).

Each part of the daily reflection is important, but is used in different ways:

The Readings

The readings for each day are just citations. You will need a Bible to look them up. We didn't just randomly pick these Scripture passages; the readings for each day are taken from the Catholic lectionary. The lectionary contains sets of readings for every day of the year, broken down into three cycles (one per year). Over the course of three years, if you read every reading, you would cover almost all of the Bible.

If you don't have a Bible or don't have the time to find each passage, you can go to a website like USCCB.org (the website of the United States Catholic Bishops) and find the daily readings there. Take time to read each; God's word is powerful and can impact us if we take time with it. This section will probably take you about five to seven minutes, depending on the length of the readings and how quickly you read.

The Reflection

Every reflection was written by a person striving to live his or her faith and follow Jesus daily. Each person took the readings of the day, prayed with them, and then wrote down their thoughts. These reflections are meant to help you pray and think about the Scripture you just read. They are meant to challenge you in your walk of faith in Lent and give you something to pray about during the day. The reflections are shorter on weekdays and longer on Sundays or holy days,

but in general, will not take you more than three to five minutes to read.

The Challenge

At the beginning of every week, there are three challenges that correspond with the traditional lenten practices of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. We've titled them, "Pray," "Let Go" (for fasting), and "Give" (for almsgiving). These challenges change each week on Sunday, but are built upon daily with reminders or smaller "mini-challenges." For example, the "Give" challenge for the first week is to donate clothing, so each day during the week the "mini-challenge" offers a suggestion for how you can prepare and find clothing to give away. The "Pray" challenge can be done to close your daily Lent Companion reading and will take you between three and five minutes. The other challenges can sometimes be done with your daily devotional, but often are practices that you do during the day.

Journey With Friends

We never journey alone; find a small group of your friends or people from your youth group to pray this lenten companion together. Hold each other accountable to the weekly challenges and discuss reflections together. Consider starting a group message to pray for each other and share encouragement. It is easy to feel isolated in our faith, but that is not how our faith is meant to be lived. Find other people to walk alongside you this Lent.

We are praying for you and walking with you, as well. Our team has put prayer and heart into this companion because we want to help you encounter Christ this Lent, just as we look forward to encountering Him, as well. Connect with us over social media to share how your journey is going (just not during the Second Week of Lent) and know that you are part of a bigger community and movement of young disciples that is connected across the world — the same world that experienced trial this past year. The same world that Jesus Christ is King and Lord over. The same world that, even though it seems to have experienced a long Lent, is going to experience a great resurrection.

WEEK OF ASH WEDNESDAY

ASH WEDNESDAY

February 17, 2021

First Reading: Joel 2:12-18

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 51

Second Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:20 — 6:2

Gospel: Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

Reflection:

The season of Lent brings a lot of “stuff” with it — like fasting, abstaining from meat on Fridays, giving away goods, “adding” spiritual practices, etc. Lent seems to be all about sacrifice in order to get holy (again). It’s basically about doing a “180”: turning away from sin (and vices and bad habits), and turning your heart back toward the Lord (through increased prayer, good works, and striving for virtue). That 180 is what it means to “repent.”

Over the next several weeks you’ll hear many church-y terms like “almsgiving” and “fasting.” You’ll hear imagery about spiritual deserts and sin and, eventually, about suffering and salvation as we draw near to Holy Week. All of these are good things that help us in our spiritual journey but sometimes all the terms and practices can distract us from the true essence of Lent, namely, to return to the Lord with your whole heart.

You’ll notice in today’s readings, there is a common theme: God wants your heart — your clean heart — and He wants all of it. This reality

might sound amazing and inviting to some reading this, overwhelming and scary to others, and unfathomable to others still. In the Gospel, Jesus warns us about making a public spectacle of our prayer and spiritual works. He warns us not to be like those who proclaim God’s greatness one minute to impress others and then turn their backs on God in private moments. This very common practice is known as hypocrisy (which comes from the Greek word for “actor”). In truth, we are all hypocrites to some degree. None of us loves God with our whole heart, all of the time. We are swayed by temptations, selfishness, and concern over what others think, just to name a few. It’s important to note, we are the ones who turn away from God, never God from us... not even when we sin.

God is always facing us, watching over us, reaching out to us and drawing near to us, even when we abandon His love for sin. So how do we overcome this natural human tendency? Jesus answers that question in the Gospel: prayer. All the things you sacrifice or add on during Lent will only be effective or helpful in your journey to holiness if they are wrapped in prayer. Prayer is where you share your heart with God but allow Him to share His with you. If you “do things” this Lent but fail to pray, you will not have truly returned to the Lord.

Focus on personal prayer, every day, and your Father “who sees in secret” will repay you.

THURSDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY

February 18, 2021

First Reading: Deuteronomy 30:15-20

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 1

Gospel: Luke 9:22-25

Pray:

As Lent begins, choose a prayer practice to keep consistent through the season. Don't go too big, here, but don't be tempted to go too easy. Today, make a list of four or five potential prayer options. We will revisit them and make a decision prior to the first Sunday of Lent.

Let Go:

Fasting allows us to "let go" of things so that we focus on being more closely united to Jesus. It is traditional to choose a season-long fast; it could be anything from a particular food to an action. Make a list of four or five options for your season-long fast. We will revisit them and make a decision prior to the first Sunday of Lent.

Give:

Almsgiving is the practice of giving up something we have for the good of another. Traditionally, this means some kind of monetary gift. We can give our time, our energy, and our abilities as well. Each week, there will be a new challenge for almsgiving. To begin Lent, do some research on a charitable organization that you would like to give a donation to and begin to plan how you will make that donation at the end of Lent.

Reflection:

If there is one element of literature that you should pay attention to in Scripture, it's this: Paradox. A paradox, for all of you who slept through English class, is something that seems false or absurd but after investigation may prove to be true. Today's readings are evidence to Scripture's abundant use of this great tool of language. In the first reading, for example, we are introduced to a deeply counter-cultural understanding of life: That "God's commandments will set us free." *record scratch* *Wait, what!?!? You might be thinking. Doesn't this contradict logic? How might laws that bind us to something, in turn, actually set us free?* Paradox, friends, paradox!

In the Gospel reading, Jesus proclaims a few more famous paradoxes saying, "... whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it." Paradox in Scripture isn't just a poetic manipulation of words; it is a deeply held truth about our humanity. Our words and our experiences within this world are finite. While we may think certain limitations or guidelines are contrary to "exploring" our humanity, it is — in actuality — only

in Christ and with God's help that we can even begin to understand who we are and for whom we were created. After all, it would be unwise to think we know better about the art than the Artist, Himself. God's Word transcends, clarifies, and illuminates the path to a full and fulfilling life.

Pray:

Take a look at the prayer practices you wrote down yesterday. Are any of these too big — so big that you will quit after a week? Be honest with yourself and cross off anything that you know is going to be difficult to keep up (e.g. a holy hour every day if you know it will be difficult to find 60 minutes, praying all of the mysteries of the rosary every day when you don't even pray one rosary a day now). Go through your list and cross off anything that will be too big to take on this Lent. If you crossed off everything, add some new (more reasonable) ideas.

Let Go:

Fasting is about detaching from good things as a sacrifice to help us focus more intently on Jesus. Fasting is not about giving up sinful things; you should give those things up, anyway. Cross off anything on your list that is actually a sin you need to give up (still give it up, but it can't be your fast).

Give:

Having trouble finding a charitable organization? Ask yourself what you believe in strongly and is there an issue in our world that breaks your heart? Chances are good it breaks someone else's heart, too. Start your research there.

FRIDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY

February 19, 2021

First Reading: Isaiah 58:1-9

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 51

Gospel: Matthew 9:14-15

Reflection:

Have you ever heard the expression, "Your heart just really wasn't in it?" It usually is spoken after someone gives a less than stellar effort in their job, they slack off in a sport, or they kind of "go through the motions" in some other activity. The "heart" we put into something matters and it shows. We can go through the motions and even speak the phrase, "I really care about this," but our effort, in the end, reveals our heart.

In the first reading, God is calling out the false religiosity of the people. They are "fasting" but their heart isn't really in it. They are just going through the motions. They don't care about what God asks of them but are instead trying to "check a box" to fulfill an obligation. Their heart isn't in it. As we begin Lent, we need to ask ourselves if we are really just "going through the motions" or if our heart is all in this season. Why are we doing what we do for fasting or prayer? Is it to open ourselves up to what God wants to do in our life, or just to fulfill an obligation without any heart?

If you find yourself lacking heart as we start Lent, fear not. What is needed is a change in perspective. The things we do out of love we often do with more