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LENT *and* EASTER
WISDOM
— *from* —
POPE FRANCIS

Daily Scripture and Prayers Together
With Pope Francis' Own Words

John Cleary



Liguori

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Contents

Preface: A Path for Lent and Easter

~ vii ~

Introduction

A Brief History of Lent

Lent as a Journey

Summons to Penitential Living

Journaling

~ ix ~

A Chronology of the Life of Pope Francis

~ xii ~

PART I

Readings for Lent

~ 1 ~

PART II

Readings for Easter

~ 103 ~





Day 1



Ash Wednesday *The Lord Seeks Conversion of Heart*

“Rend your hearts and not your garments” (Joel 2:13).

These penetrating words of the Prophet Joel...[point] to conversion of heart as the chief characteristic of this season of grace. The prophetic appeal challenges all of us without exception, and it reminds us that conversion is not to be reduced to outward forms or to vague intentions, but engages and transforms one’s entire existence beginning from the center of the person, from the conscience.

FRANCIS’ HOMILY AT HOLY MASS,
BLESSING AND IMPOSITION OF THE ASHES,
BASILICA OF SANTA SABINA, MARCH 5, 2014



SCRIPTURE

The Pharisees saw this and said to his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” [Jesus] heard this and said, “Those who are well do not need a physician, but the sick do. Go and learn the meaning of the words, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ I did not come to call the righteous but sinners.”

MATTHEW 9:11–13

PRAYER

Great and generous Lord, physician to our souls, you came to those who needed you the most. People with open hearts were drawn to you; nothing they were prescribed by the spiritual leaders of the time filled the emptiness inside. These people did not put on airs; they wanted to love you and they desired your love, compassion, and healing in return. Just as you gave yourself to those people during your earthly ministry, we ask that you give yourself to us today. This is all we ask. Amen.

LENTEN ACTION

In your journal, write a response to this: In what ways do I find myself unfulfilled by the “answers” and “medicine” that the world offers? Why does worldliness fail to satisfy my hunger for union and intimacy with others? What can Jesus provide that satisfies the hunger I feel at my core? At what times in my life have I known this fulfillment? During what periods has it been lacking?





Day 2



Thursday After Ash Wednesday Fasting Reminds Us of the Essential

Fasting makes sense if it questions our security, and if it also leads to some benefit for others, if it helps us to cultivate the style of the Good Samaritan, who bends down to his brother in need and takes care of him. Fasting involves choosing a sober lifestyle; a way of life that does not waste, a way of life that does not “throw away.” Fasting helps us to attune our hearts to the essential and to sharing.

FRANCIS' HOMILY AT HOLY MASS,
BLESSING AND IMPOSITION OF THE ASHES,
BASILICA OF SANTA SABINA, MARCH 5, 2014



SCRIPTURE

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.

MATTHEW 6:16–18

PRAYER

Loving God, who sees all and knows our every intention, grace us with the desire to fast for the sake of deeper intimacy with you and greater empathy with our brothers and sisters who go to bed hungry every night. Allow our fasting to help us understand the true value of sustenance. Help us appreciate the gifts you give in a deeper way, even on those occasions where we are left wanting more. May this deeper union with you satisfy us beyond what mere food can provide. Amen.

LENTEN ACTION

In your journal, write a response to this: Describe your experience of fasting. How does fasting affect you from a spiritual point of view? How does the practice affect your relationship with God? How does it affect your understanding, appreciation, and empathy with those who go without on a regular basis? How does fasting shape your prayer life? How does the practice of fasting keep you from taking what you have for granted?





Day
3

*Friday After Ash Wednesday
Create Something New*

With its invitations to conversion, Lent comes providentially to awaken us, to rouse us from torpor, from the risk of moving forward by inertia. The exhortation which the Lord addresses to us through the prophet Joel is strong and clear: “Return to me with your whole heart” (Joel 2:12). Why must we return to God? Because something is not right in us, not right in society, in the Church and we need to change, to give it a new direction. And this is called needing to convert!

FRANCIS’ HOMILY AT HOLY MASS,
BLESSING AND IMPOSITION OF THE ASHES,
BASILICA OF SANTA SABINA, MARCH 5, 2014



SCRIPTURE

*A clean heart create for me, God;
renew within me a steadfast spirit.
Do not drive me from before your face,
nor take from me your holy spirit.
Restore to me the gladness of your salvation;
uphold me with a willing spirit.*

PSALM 51:12–14

PRAYER

Lord God, fashion within me a willing spirit, one that embraces the promise of Lent and its fulfillment of salvation on Easter Sunday. Wake me from my lethargy, from the apathy that insidiously seeps into my consciousness when I am preoccupied with lesser goods. You are the greatest good available. Move my heart, soften it, allow it to open and blossom to the promise of conversion that Lent affords us. I ask this in the name of the Word and the Resurrection, your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

LENTEN ACTION

What are your goals for this Lent? As a child, and still as adults, we are often encouraged to give something up, but as we mature in our faith we should also add during Lent. Often, what's added is a clean heart acquired from the Father's grace that allows us to be sensitive to the needs of others, understanding and addressing their needs before tending to our own. What might you add to your spiritual exercises during this Lenten season?





Day 4



Saturday After Ash Wednesday God's Love Transforms

*I*t was only in this way, by taking flesh, by sharing our humanity, that the knowledge proper to love could come to full fruition. For the light of love is born when our hearts are touched and we open ourselves to the interior presence of the beloved, who enables us to recognize his mystery....By his taking flesh and coming among us, Jesus has touched us, and through the sacraments he continues to touch us even today; transforming our hearts, he unceasingly enables us to acknowledge and acclaim him as the Son of God.

FRANCIS' ENCYCLICAL LETTER *LUMEN FIDEI*, 31, JUNE 29, 2013

SCRIPTURE

*What was from the beginning,
what we have heard,
what we have seen with our eyes,
what we looked upon
and touched with our hands
concerns the Word of life[.]*

1 JOHN 1:1



PRAYER

Heavenly Father, by your generosity through the mystery of the Incarnation, your Son became man. The Word took on flesh and sanctified every aspect of our human experience. God ate with us, walked by our side, spoke with us, taught us, healed us, and forgave us. Everything human he blessed by his presence in the flesh so that, when we experience what he experienced, we enter into a human-divine bond with God, an intimacy that could never have occurred without the mystery of the Incarnation. We can only express our gratitude for this deep love and cherish the reality that the divine has transformed our humanity. Amen.

LENTEN ACTION

By taking on our humanity through the mystery of the Incarnation, Jesus sanctified every facet of our existence, from the way we relate to one another, to the way we enter into intimacy in prayer with God, to the way we are able to express mercy and forgiveness to one another. When you reflect on the mystery of the Incarnation, what area of your humanity are you most thankful that Jesus has sanctified by becoming man?





Day
5

First Sunday of Lent
We Are Born Anew

How does one become a member of this people? It is not through physical birth, but through a new birth....It is through Baptism that we are introduced into this people, through faith in Christ, a gift from God that must be nourished and cultivated throughout our life. Let us ask ourselves: how do I make this faith that I received in my Baptism grow?

FRANCIS, GENERAL AUDIENCE, ST. PETER'S SQUARE,
JUNE 12, 2013

SCRIPTURE

Thomas said to him, "Master, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

JOHN 14:5–6



PRAYER

Jesus, my dearest and most intimate friend, I have experienced a new birth with you. If I was a baby when my baptism happened I may not remember it, or it might have been something I chose as an adult, but—nonetheless—I am born “from on high, from water and from the Spirit.” I later confirmed this pledge through the sacrament and am ready to enter the kingdom of heaven after my life on earth is finished. And may I ask you this grace, my Lord? Transform my heart, humble it in the manner of a child’s heart, that I may see with the eyes of a child, with eyes that trust, with eyes that constantly wonder in awe at your greatness and glory. Amen.

LENTEN ACTION

This exercise calls for an effort of memory. Recall portions of your childhood. Your first circus. First trip to a big-league baseball game. An early Christmas. Imagine your eyes, wide with wonder. You were naïve and every experience was new. Now you’re older. Experiences that were once new and wondrous might seem stale. This does not mean you’ve lost the eyes of a child or the humility a child exudes in the encounter of a new experience. Pray on this. Ask God for freshness of heart, for new eyes, for humility. God will grace you with a child’s eyes and you can experience his presence in everything again.

