

Catholic

UPDATE

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MARCH 2019

C1903A

Lent Day by Day LIVING OUR BELIEFS

JOHN SHEA

Lent triggers an “I can do better” attitude and connects with my childhood memory of the little engine that could. Most of all, during Lent I feel a need to shake free and start again. Throughout the year I have collected barnacles and need a good scraping. Our skin is a model of rejuvenation. But our soul needs constant attention. It grows world-weary. We tend to lose our joy and carry each day as an intolerable burden. So during Lent I pray: *Lord, illumine and inspire me to shed the heaviness of my soul and embrace your gift of life. Amen.* —John Shea

ASH WEDNESDAY

Although Ash Wednesday is primarily a Catholic ritual, even those who today commonly refer to themselves as nonreligious may wait to have their forehead blackened. Ashes are a gentle reminder of our death. In this ritual, we acknowledge our mortality in a way that doesn't debilitate us. We often push aside harsh reminders, while we more readily accept gentle ones. Realizing our present life is short encourages us to see time as an opportunity to love. Seize it!

FRIDAY

Revive Your Soul So much sin has the cumulative effect of making us resign ourselves to the current wretched state of affairs. We give in to what is and then lose our zest for a better life. Our desire for the kingdom of God departs. In medieval spirituality, this condition was called *acedia*, the sloth of the soul. The soul is too fat to move and has become a couch potato. To counteract this, the spiritual admonition to the soul is to stay hungry—revive your desire for adventure.

SATURDAY

Know Who You Are Not After Jesus' baptism, he hears for the first time the Father's voice that tells him who he is: “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17). Our baptism calls us to let go of all the wrongs done to us, as well as those we have inflicted on others. As a result, we may find we are between identities. Something has ended, but has anything new begun? Now, with our sins forgiven, we're open to hear the word of love. You have been washed anew. Let go of who you are not.

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

Finding Joy in God's Love We are a bundle of needs. Though fulfillment and love seems a natural coupling, most lives are a combination of fulfillment and deprivation. In the desert, Jesus refutes Satan's attempts to this end. Jesus insists that even lacking fulfillment of basic needs, he remains God's Son and knows he is loved. God's love may be revealed in times of blessing, but it persists in times of burden. We must follow Jesus' example, always living out our beliefs.

MONDAY

Embracing Our “Middle Identity” We hold hands with the past and the future. It's important to take this “middle identity” seriously, especially in relation to our Christianity. We're integral to the chain of clasped hands that goes back to the hand of Jesus. More than inheritors, we are ancestors. We are called to be a Christian link to future generations and pass along what we've received. Our middle identity is a truth that connects us to the past, present, and future.

THURSDAY

Find Your True Mission The story of Jesus fasting for forty days in the desert validates fasting as a spiritual practice, but it also raises the question: What does fasting do? The contemporary ideal is to subordinate eating to the higher value of a long and healthy life. Jesus' refusal to eat is about overcoming the temptation to see ourselves as only physical beings with physical needs. Jesus does not live by bread alone. Neither do we. And every time we do not take food, we remember this truth and seek a higher purpose.

