

LENT *and*
EASTER
WISDOM
— *from* —
SAINT IGNATIUS
OF LOYOLA

Daily Scripture and Prayers
Together With Saint Ignatius' Own Words

Compiled by James L. Connor, SJ



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Introduction

BORN IN OCTOBER 1491, IGNATIUS WAS the youngest of the thirteen children of a Basque nobleman of the ancient and well-to-do family of Loyola. At the age of sixteen, Ignatius was sent to be a page in the court of the treasurer at the kingdom of Castille. Prone to vanity, he became, on his own admission, addicted to gambling, sword play, and women. When he was thirty-one, he was severely wounded in battle. During his long recuperation, while reading a Life of Christ and a book of the lives of the saints, he underwent a profound religious conversion. From that time on, he dedicated his life to companionship with Jesus in his mission of serving others. As soon as he was well enough, he journeyed to Jerusalem in order to walk in Jesus' footsteps. On returning to Europe, he enrolled in school where he led a group of friends through the steps of his own conversion experience—soon to be called his “Spiritual Exercises”—and with them, founded a religious order, The Companions (or Society) of Jesus. Their mission was to “save souls” by directing others in the Spiritual Exercises, preaching, teaching, and serving the poor. During Lent and Easter week, we will be walking with Jesus under the guidance of Saint Ignatius of Loyola and his Spiritual Exercises.

On the first thirteen days of our journey, we will accompany Saint Ignatius Loyola as he makes his own Lent-to-Easter journey in a personal conversion experience under the guidance of Jesus. Thereafter, we will be guided by Saint Ignatius along the pathway of his Spiritual Exercises on our own Lent-to-Easter journey with Christ.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF LENT

Most Catholics seem to be aware that the forty-day period before the feast of Easter—Lent, which comes from the Anglo-Saxon word *lencten*, meaning “spring”—is a time marked by particular rituals such as the reception of ashes on Ash Wednesday or the decision to give up French fries. Is Lent broader than just these practices that seem to be left over from another era?

In the first three centuries of Christian experience, preparation for the Easter feast usually covered a period of one or two days, perhaps a week at the most. Saint Irenaeus of Lyons (ca. AD 140–202) even speaks of a *forty-hour* preparation for Easter.

The first reference to Lent as a period of forty days’ preparation occurs in the teachings of the First Council of Nicaea in AD 325. By the end of the fourth century, a Lenten period of forty days was established and accepted.

In its early development, Lent quickly became associated with the sacrament of baptism, since Easter was the great baptismal feast. Those who were preparing to be baptized participated in the season of Lent in preparation for the reception of the sacrament of baptism. Eventually, those who were already baptized considered it important to join these candidates preparing for baptism in their preparations for Easter. The customs and practices of Lent as we know them today soon took hold.

LENT AS A JOURNEY

Lent is often portrayed as a journey, from one point in time to another point in time. The concept of journey is obvious for those experiencing the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA), the program of baptismal preparation conducted in most parishes during the season of Lent.

But Lenten preparation is not limited to those who are preparing to be baptized and join the Church. For many Catholics, Lent is a journey that is measured from Ash Wednesday through Easter Sunday, but more accurately, Lent is measured from Ash Wednesday to the beginning of the period known as the Triduum.

Triduum begins with the Mass on Holy Thursday, continues through Good Friday, and concludes with the Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday. Triduum officially ends with the proclamation of the Exsultet, “Rejoice, O Heavenly Powers,” during the Mass of Holy Saturday.

By whatever yardstick the journey is measured, it is not only the time that is important but the essential experiences of the journey that are necessary for a full appreciation of what is being celebrated.

The Lenten journey is also a process of spiritual growth and, as such, presumes movement from one state of being to another state. For example, some people may find themselves troubled and anxious at the beginning of Lent as a result of a life choice or an unanswered question, and, at the end of Lent, they may fully expect a sense of conversion, a sense of peace, or perhaps simply understanding and acceptance. Therefore, Lent is a movement from one point of view to another or, perhaps, from one interpretation of life to a different interpretation.

Scripture, psalms, prayers, rituals, practices, and penance are the components of the Lenten journey. Each component, tried and tested by years of tradition, is one of the “engines” that drives the season and which brings the weary spiritual traveler to the joys of Easter.

PENITENTIAL NATURE OF LENT

A popular understanding of Lent is that it is a penitential period of time during which people attempt to become more sensitive to the role of sin in their lives. Lenten sermons will speak of personal sin, coming to an awareness of the sins of others and the effect such sin might have, and the sin that can be found within our larger society and culture. Awareness of sin, however, is balanced by an emphasis on the love and acceptance that God still has for humanity, despite the sinful condition in which we still find ourselves.

The practice of meditation of the Passion of the Lord, his suffering and his death, is also seen as part of the penitential experience of Lent. There is also a traditional concern for the reception of the



sacrament of reconciliation during Lent. Originally, the sacrament of reconciliation was celebrated before Lent began. The penance was imposed on Ash Wednesday and performed during the entire forty-day period.

SUMMONS TO PENITENTIAL LIVING

“Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news’” (Mark 1:14–15). This call to conversion announces the solemn opening of Lent. Participants are marked with ashes, and the words, “Repent, and believe in the good news,” are prayed. This blessing is understood as a personal acceptance of the desire to take on the life of penance for the sake of the Gospel.

The example of Jesus in the desert for forty days—a time during which he fasted and prayed—is imitated. It is time to center attention on conversion. During Lent, the expectation is to examine our lives and, through the practice of prayer, fasting, and works of charity, seek to conform our lives to Christ’s. For some, this conversion will be a turning from sin to grace. For others, it will be a gracious turning toward the mystery of God in Christ. Whatever the pattern chosen by a particular pilgrim for an observance of Lent, it is hoped that this book will provide a useful support in the effort.



PART I



READINGS
for LENT



DAY 1

ASH WEDNESDAY

The Lenten Journey Begins

IGNATIUS WRITES OF HIMSELF

Up to his twenty-sixth year he was a man given over to the vanities of the world, and took a special delight in the exercise of arms, with a great and vain desire of winning glory. He was in a fortress which the French were attacking....After the assault had been going on for some time, a cannon ball struck him in the leg, crushing its bones, and because it passed between his legs it also seriously wounded the other....

After twelve or fifteen days in Pamplona they bore him in a litter to his own country.

ST. IGNATIUS' OWN STORY (WRITTEN IN THIRD PERSON), 7

SAINT PAUL'S CALL TO CONVERSION

Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" He asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."

ACTS 9:1-5

PRAYER

Dear Lord, as you called Saint Paul and Saint Ignatius to a profound conversion to serve your people, please give me the generosity to respond to your call during this Lenten and Easter celebration.

LENTEN ACTION

Jot down two things today in the journal you are keeping during this Lent and Easter experience:

- What blocks you from being attentive and responsive to the needs of others?
- Describe the joy you experienced when you helped someone who was really in need.





DAY 2

THURSDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY

God's Providence in Life Experiences

THE POWER OF VANITY

When the bones knit, one below the knee remained astride another, which caused a shortening of the leg. The bones so raised cause a protuberance that was not pleasant to the sight. The sick man was not able to put up with this, because he had made up his mind to seek his fortune in the world. He...asked the surgeons whether it could not be cut away. They told him that it could be cut away, but that the pain would be greater than all he had already suffered....He determined, nevertheless, to undergo this martyrdom to gratify his own inclinations.

ST. IGNATIUS' OWN STORY, 8

THE POWER OF SERVICE

“A certain Ananias, who was a devout man according to the law and well spoken of by all the Jews living there, came to me; and standing beside me, he said, ‘Brother Saul, regain your sight!’ In that very hour I regained my sight and saw him. Then he said, ‘The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear his own voice; for you will be his witness to all the world of what you have seen and heard.’”

ACTS 22:12–15

PRAYER

Dear Lord, as I embark on this Lenten and Easter journey, free me from the vanity that imprisoned the young Ignatius Loyola. Fill me with the Holy Spirit that empowered Paul of Tarsus to travel the known world in service of others and the call of the Gospel. This I ask in the name of Jesus our Lord. Amen.

LENTEN ACTION

Look for the opportunity throughout the day to congratulate at least two people for something they have done well. Nothing builds trust and confidence more than affirmation like that.





DAY 3

FRIDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY

The Beginnings of a Call

THE CHRIST LIFE: THE MESSAGE

He had been much given to reading worldly books of fiction and knight errantry, and feeling well enough to read he asked for some of these books to help while away the time. In that house, however, they could find none of those he was accustomed to read, and so they gave him a Life of Christ and a book of the Lives of the Saints in Spanish.

By the frequent reading of these books he conceived some affection for what he found there narrated. Pausing in his reading, he gave himself up to thinking over what he had read.

ST. IGNATIUS' OWN STORY, 8

THE CHRIST-LIFE: THE MISSION

“But get up and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and testify to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you. I will rescue you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.”

ACTS 26:16–18

PRAYER

Dear Lord, let the young Ignatius be my model when I read or hear the Gospel story of Jesus and his life. Help me to read slowly, to pause and reflect, and to appreciate gratefully what Jesus has done for me and the life he has given me. This I pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

LENTEN ACTION

Jot down briefly in your Lent and Easter journal three incidents in the life of Jesus that really move you. Describe—again briefly—why you find them so moving. Say a short prayer of thanks to Jesus.

