

A 40-Day LENTEN
Prayer
Journal



INTRODUCTION

As we enter the season of Lent, we recall that it is a time of preparation to celebrate the Lord's Paschal Mystery, His death on the cross and resurrection. As Pope Benedict XVI explained in his 2008 Lenten message, "Lent offers us a providential opportunity to deepen the meaning and value of our Christian lives, and it stimulates us to rediscover the mercy of God so that we, in turn, become more merciful toward our brothers and sisters. In the Lenten period, the Church makes it her duty to propose some specific tasks that accompany the faithful concretely in this process of interior renewal: these are prayer, fasting and almsgiving."

The U.S. bishops have courageously proclaimed a three-year initiative — the National Eucharistic Revival — to renew our own beliefs in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, and not only to believe in it, but also profess it and share it with others.

Relying on the wisdom of Scripture, saints and spiritual leaders, this Lenten journal invites us to draw into deeper union with God in our interior lives, to renew our spirits and set our gaze upon Jesus.

We invite you to begin and end each daily reflection with this prayer:

*Come Holy Spirit!
Open my heart to hear the whisper of Your voice.
Thank you for setting aside these solemn days
where we enter into a deeper time of prayer, fasting and almsgiving.
I want to be transformed during these 40 days
so that I can rise as a new creation
with Jesus on Easter morning.
Be with me as I journey through the Lenten desert,
seeking and thirsting for the water of Your love.
Help me to hear Your voice
so that I can do Your will.
Set my heart on fire,
burning out of love for You,
Jesus, present in the Eucharist.
In Jesus' name,
Amen.*

DAY 7

“For the liturgy, ‘through which the work of our redemption is accomplished,’ most of all in the divine sacrifice of the Eucharist, is the outstanding means whereby the faithful may express in their lives, and manifest to others, the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church. It is of the essence of the Church that she be both human and divine, visible and yet invisibly equipped, eager to act and yet intent on contemplation, present in this world and yet not at home in it; and she is all these things in such wise that in her the human is directed and subordinated to the divine, the visible likewise to the invisible, action to contemplation, and this present world to that city yet to come, which we seek.”

— Sacrosanctum Concilium (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy), Vatican II

These are the opening words of the documents from the Second Vatican Council. While it can appear like a bit of a longwinded list of seemingly contradictory statements, it sums up the Church’s call in the modern world. This speaks to both the mystery of our faith and the balance in which we are called to live. During Lent, we are asked to fast, and many of us give up extra things that we love or enjoy to make room for more time of prayer and to give Christ more room in our lives. We spend 40 days anticipating the coming death of Christ and those quiet first days of the Triduum. And yet Sunday after Sunday, we continue to celebrate the rising of Christ, just as we spend those same 40 days anticipating the rising of Christ on Easter. This is part of our faith, we live Good Friday and Easter Sunday—the death and the resurrection. Christ and the Church are both human and divine, we all must live in deep contemplation and prayer and act out of that prayer.

What are the ways you feel pulled by your faith in two directions, both within yourself and your personal spiritual life, and outwardly to others?

DAY 8

“What good is it if the bread is changed and we are not?”

— *Father Godfrey Diekmann, OSB*

Godfrey Diekmann was a monk of Saint John’s Abbey and one of 46 theologians chosen from around the world to prepare the schema on liturgy during Vatican II. He taught theology at Saint John’s University for 65 years before retiring in 1998. He died in 2002. One of his notable challenges to his students was, “What good is it if the bread is changed and we are not?” How often we might casually come forward to receive Jesus in the Eucharist and return to our seats not fully comprehending the miracle witnessed in front of us and now Living Bread inside of us! How do we take what was once fruit and grain into our bodies, minds and souls and become changed ourselves? This requires not only belief in the real presence, but also desire and action. We have to believe, desire and act to respond to the gift we have received from the Lord and have it bear the fruit He desires in and through us.

What do you believe about the Real Presence? What questions do you have? Research your findings, talk to trusted friends or leaders and pray that your heart be open to belief, desire and action. Name your biggest challenges, your greatest desires and ways you can take action this week, month, year.

DAY 30

“In the Eucharist, we in fact encounter the living Jesus and His strength, and through Him we enter into communion with our brothers and sisters in the faith: those who live with us here on earth and those who have gone before us into the next life, the unending life. This reality fills us with joy: it is beautiful to have so many brothers and sisters in the faith who walk beside us, supporting us with their help, and together we travel the same road toward heaven. And it is comforting to know that there are other brothers and sisters who have already reached heaven, who await us and pray for us, so that together in eternity we can contemplate the glorious and merciful face of the Father.”

— Pope Francis, from the Angelus, Nov. 1, 2014

One of the beautiful parts of the Catholic faith is our belief in the communion of saints. Through the hope of the resurrection, which we encounter at the end of our Lenten season, we know that those who have gone before us are sharing in the eternal banquet. At certain key liturgies, including the Easter Vigil, we often hear sung or prayed the Litany of Saints. This prayer is a special petition for prayers, beginning with asking for God’s mercy, then asking for prayers from a list of saints and all holy people, moving then to prayers for mercy and deliverance from various evils, and ending with special prayers for the occasion. What a beautiful reminder to us of all of those who walk with us daily, and where to go in our highs and lows of daily life. All you holy women and men, pray for us.

What saint do you feel particularly close to and why? Is there a new saint you can learn about this Lenten season to journey with you and pray for you?

DAY 33

“Thus says the Lord God: O my people, I will open your graves and have you rise from them, and bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and have you rise from them, O my people! I will put my spirit in you that you may live, and I will settle you upon your land; thus you shall know that I am the Lord. I have promised, and I will do it, says the Lord.”

— Ezekiel 37:12-14

During Lent, we hear the words of Ezekiel 37, the story of the dry bones. What is a more fitting story during the season of Lent, a season often associated with desert imagery, than dry, dusty, lifeless bones? Our spiritual lives go through ups and downs, moments of mountaintop peaks, where God feels so close, times of dryness, where God couldn't feel further away, and the normal routines of our typical daily prayer lives. The Church's seasons ebb and flow as well, reflecting our own prayer lives. The hopeful anticipation and celebration of the birth of Christ in Advent and Christmas, Ordinary Time where we live comfortably into the daily rituals. Lent can sometimes feel uncomfortable, to enter into the desert, into a time of stripping away and simplifying. However, through this time of prayer and fasting, God is breathing new life into us, so that that as Christ resurrects on Easter and the liturgical year turns to a season of joy and celebration, hopefully we too emerge filled with the Spirit and renewed.

What new spirit am I looking for to breathe into my life this Lent?

DAY 35

“But if any one has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth.”

— 1 John 3:17-18

Loving the way that Jesus calls us to love is such a challenge for most Christians. We prefer to remember the poor among us in our prayers from the comfort of our warm, cozy homes. Of course, without prayer, our good works lack focus on God. But prayer without action is equally as incomplete. To be completely Christian we need to be the boots on the ground that our current state of life allows.

Have I taken time to ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the poor in need to me? Have I researched and prayed about which charitable organizations would best benefit from my contributions?

