

#### 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.



"I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats from this bread, he will live forever; and the bread which I will give for the life of the world also is My flesh."

— John 6:51

It makes sense to start with this quote as it is the inspiration for the theme of the National Eucharistic Revival, "My flesh for the life of the world." We all know that we need to eat for physical strength and nourishment. During Lent, we are asked to fast as a spiritual discipline. We might hear the word "discipline" and think of this as a punishment or penance; however, the root word of discipline actually means "to teach." Lent can be a time for us to learn and grow and be spiritually fed with the Bread of Life.

next 40 days? What is one thing you'd like to lear	n more about:

"Material food first changes into the one who eats it, and then, as a consequence, restores to him lost strength and increases his vitality. Spiritual food, on the other hand, changes the person who eats it into itself. Thus the effect proper to this Sacrament is the conversion of a man into Christ, so that he may no longer live, but Christ lives in him; consequently, it has the double effect of restoring the spiritual strength he had lost by his sins and defects, and of increasing the strength of his virtues."

— St. Thomas, Commentary on Book IV of the Sentences

St. Thomas draws on these words from Galatians 2:20, "...it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." That is what happens to us when we receive the Eucharist. It is not only material food we are consuming, it is Jesus himself, who we take into our body, mind and soul as spiritual food. It is meant to be transformative, as St. Thomas says, to restore our spirits and increase our virtue, so that when we leave the church, we are able to go forth and spread the Gospel. This is a free gift, but it does require something from us – our belief in it and our desire to accept the conversion in our hearts.

onger I who live, but Chris	i who iives in	,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,	

"You come to me and unite Yourself intimately to me under the form of nourishment. Your Blood now runs in mine, Your Soul, Incarnate God, compenetrates mine, giving courage and support. What miracles! Who would have ever imagined such!"

— St. Maximilian Kolbe

Jesus can and does use many ways to make his presence in the world known to us. At the Last Supper, He gave his disciples specific instructions to take and eat, "This is my body, this is my blood." Just as God, fully human and fully divine, became flesh and dwelt among us, He picked bread and wine to become His flesh and blood and reside inside us. This act of love so intimately unites us, giving His very self to us, in the form of physical and spiritual nourishment. What miracles! Who would have ever imagined such!

	ne time to imagine today. Imagine how much you are loved and cherished.  how much you love and cherish others. Imagine who might not be receiving
_	or spiritual nourishment. Through prayer, fasting or almsgiving, how might you
provide 1	nourishment to someone this week?

"What is contemplative prayer? St. Teresa answers: 'Contemplative prayer [oracion mental] in my opinion is nothing else than a close sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with him who we know loves us.' Contemplative prayer seeks him 'whom my soul loves.' It is Jesus, and in him, the Father. We seek him, because to desire him is always the beginning of love, and we seek him in that pure faith which causes us to be born of him and to live in him. In this inner prayer we can still meditate, but our attention is fixed on the Lord himself."

— Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2709

Mental prayer can be a difficult thing — where do I start? What do I say? The Church offers beautiful liturgy and prayers to help us pray. What St. Teresa and the catechism reveals to us in this passage is an invitation to think of our relationship with God as a personal relationship, a friendship, a sharing between friends. We can start with simple words, as we do when we greet a friend, and over time that relationship deepens, and we share more and more of ourselves. This is what God desires: our attention and our presence.

"When you have received Him, stir up your heart to do Him homage; speak to Him about your spiritual life, gazing upon Him in your soul where He is present for your happiness; welcome Him as warmly as possible, and behave outwardly in such a way that your actions may give proof to all of His Presence."

— St. Francis de Sales

In yesterday's reflection, we talked about mental prayer. Today's reflection continues that feeling. Just as when you meet a friend, you may walk away feeling more joyful or you may have something new to ponder. When you leave Mass or complete your prayer time, Jesus wants you to leave feeling strengthened and renewed and to take that feeling to others. While the relationship between you and Jesus is personal, his love is intended to be shared.

Be intentional today. Say hello to Jesus now and ask him to renew your spirit so you can

spread his love to others. Make a call, send a text, write a note to someone you haven't talked to in a while. Welcome them so warmly that your actions prove Jesus' presence.

"The only thing we have to ask God for, in prayer, is the desire to be holy."

— Blessed Carlo Acutis, patron of the National Eucharistic Revival

Blessed Carlo Acutis figured this out in his short 15 years of life. The Italian teenager was a gamer who developed a very close relationship with Jesus and was especially drawn to Eucharistic miracles. Using his gifts, he built a website promoting them. When he died from leukemia in 2006, he was buried in jeans and Nike shoes. He lived an ordinary life in today's modern world and left behind an extraordinary legacy. Our interior life of prayer does not have to be extravagant, routine or perfect. As Blessed Carlo said, we need to pray for the desire to be holy. The rest will come.

What does it mean to be holy? What actions reflect holiness in my daily life? Dear Lord, today please stoke your holy fire in my heart so that I may desire you more and more.

Help me know that my prayer life doesn't have to be perfect to glorify you and that my actions can be a form of prayer.



"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 contradictive 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 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.

"Believe what you see, see what you believe and become what you are: the Body of Christ."

— *St. Augustine* 

We don't do life alone. There are many times we may feel alone. By our baptism, we have become part of something bigger than ourselves. Whether we like it or not, whether we see it or not, we are all part of the Body of Christ. We belong to each other. We belong to the Lord. When one part of our Body suffers, the remaining parts of the Body are to surround and care for the weakest parts. When you feel alone, you can rely on the community to pray for you. That is what we do at Mass — we pray for each other. We forgive each other. We sacrifice for each other. We lift up our hearts together. When we go to the altar to receive Communion, we believe what we see in front of us is the Body of Christ and when we consume it, we become what we receive.

oday? Pray for an i	ncrease of faith	in the real pro	esence of Jesus	in the Euchari	st.

"Coming to the Eucharist is not a bracketed time of piety or prayerful refuge in an otherwise secular existence; it is the integral and natural breath of our Christian life. We gather to take in Jesus; we are sent by him to give out his love in everything the next hours and days hold, pleasant and difficult. My sacrifice and yours ... what does it mean to you, today?"

— Father Tom Knoblach

Lent is a time where we focus on the greatest sacrifice of all time: God sacrificing his Son on the Cross for our sins. In today's culture, it is so easy to lose sight of what it means to make sacrifices. We fall into the temptation of entitlement and privilege. We forget that we weren't made for comfort, as Pope Benedict XVI said, we were made for greatness. Just as Jesus gave his life for us, we are asked to make sacrifices for others. Whether the cost is great or small, we can be assured that it is recognized by our Creator. The questions Father Tom asks are: Do we recognize the sacrifice made for us? And can we show our gratitude in our daily lives for what Jesus did for us?

ow? Ask for his stre	ngth to sustain y	you. What is or	ie way I can giv	e out Christ's love	? today?

"By the solemn forty days of Lent, the Church unites herself each year to the mystery of Jesus in the desert."

— Catechism of the Catholic Church, 540

The catechism goes on to further explain how Jesus, the New Adam, remained faithful during his 40 days of fasting and praying in the desert before His public ministry. This is in complete contrast with Adam in the Book of Genesis as well as the Israelites who lived in the desert for 40 years provoking God. Jesus was totally obedient to the divine will of the Father, and in this way is the devil's conqueror. The 40 solemn days we observe every Lent strengthen our minds and bodies as we mortify ourselves with fasting. By being able to control our passions and deny ourselves bodily comfort, we are re-calibrating and re-aligning ourselves to God's divine will. It is in this holy practice that we too will be able to resist the devil's temptations and conquer our self-will.

disposition that of a	te towara jasting: L denying myself to g		i, 01 is my

"By sharing in the sacrifice of the Cross, the Christian partakes of Christ's self-giving love and is equipped and committed to live this same charity in all his thoughts and deeds." — St. John Paul II, Veritatis Splendor, 107

During Lent, many of us take part in the Stations of the Cross. This practice of prayer helps us to gain more understanding as we walk with Jesus as he knowingly makes his way to the cross. The sacrifice that was made for us can feel hard to understand or sometimes maybe disconnected from our daily faith life. This prayer practice helps us to reconnect this sacrifice to our faith and recall how we enter into that sacrifice each time we partake in Eucharist.

When have you knowingly had to do something you didn't want to do? Reflect on why you

did it anyway. What are some ways you can express self-giving love?

"You, the food of the angels, have given Yourself in a fire of love to men. You, the
garment which covers all our nakedness, feed the hungry with your sweetness."
— St. Catherine of Siena

Almsgiving is one of the powerful legs that our Lenten interior transformation rests upon. In giving, we empty ourselves of our selfishness. But let us not forget about spiritual hunger. Jesus, truly present in the Eucharist, wants us to come to Him in this powerful sacrament and feed us with the Bread of Life. Our giving is a response to His words, "Do this in memory of Me."

Do I come to the Eucharist hungry for Him who loves me and thirsts for my love in return? How can I rearrange my schedule to make time to attend an extra Mass this week?

"Dear brothers and sisters, the Eucharist is at the root of every form of holiness, and each of us is called to the fullness of life in the Holy Spirit. How many saints have advanced along the way of perfection thanks to their Eucharistic devotion!"

— Pope Benedict XVI, Sacramentum Caritatis

We are all called to become saints, yet it will be the challenge of our lifetime. Becoming perfect, as our Heavenly Father is perfect, may seem impossible. But by going to the very source and summit of our faith in the Eucharist, we can be transformed. Only Jesus can strip us of our former selves and clothe us in the light of His saving grace. This takes time and gradual growth and therefore also requires perseverance.

How can I rearrange my schedule this week to attend an hour of adoration of the Blessed

Sacrament? Do I really believe that the Eucharist is the source and summit of my faith, and if not, what can I do to fall deeper in love with this life-changing sacrament?					

"If man seeks God and wants to find him, if he desires a life of the most intimate union with him, silence is the most direct path and the surest means of attaining it. Silence is of capital importance because it enables the Church to walk in the footsteps of Jesus, imitating his thirty years in Nazareth, his forty days and forty nights of fasting and intimate dialogue with the Father in solitude and silence in the desert."

— Cardinal Robert Sarah

In our chaotic world, silence has an almost negative connotation. It may seem that if we aren't "busying" ourselves with noise and distraction we aren't being useful and are therefore "lazy." Sitting in complete silence with God seems like a waste of time for most of us "efficient" task-managers. But remember that Our Lord speaks in whispers, so if we aren't spending even a few minutes in silence, we may not hear Him speaking and we will miss out on so much of His great plan for our lives.

my heart and just sit with Our Lord? Why am I afraid of silence?					

"Great is the mystery of the faith!" The Church professes this mystery in the Apostles' Creed and celebrates it in the sacramental liturgy so that the life of the faithful may be conformed to Christ in the Holy Spirit to the glory of God the Father. This mystery, then, requires that the faithful believe in it, that they celebrate it, and that they live from it in a vital and personal relationship with the living and true God. This relationship is prayer."

— Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2558

It is an act of the will to believe the truths of our faith because they are often abstract and impossible for our simple minds to comprehend. We celebrate these mysteries in the sacraments that the Church imparts. But how do we live this mystery? We come humbly to our Heavenly Father in prayer with our arms outstretched. We come as simple children and pray, "Lord, I believe! Help my unbelief." It's a place for a conversation to begin with the Living God and the Church He established. From there, we let Him lead and we simply follow.

littleness, and embrace it, allowing myself to be loved by our Heavenly Father?					

"When we attend to the needs of those in want, we give them what is theirs, not ours.

More than performing works of mercy, we are paying a debt of justice."

— St. Gregory the Great

Sometimes we pat ourselves on the back when we help someone in need, and really feel good about how we gave to someone who could never repay us. As members of the Body of Christ, we are all connected in a very special way. Because we all belong to the same body, we are OBLIGATED to give to be true to our very selves. Just as our human body pumps blood everywhere, not discriminating in favor of specific limbs or organs, so too are we obliged to give to those less fortunate who are also members of the Body of Christ.

Have I asked Our Lord who is most in need? Have I then freely given because I saw the face of Our Lord in that beautiful person?

"If you are able to fast, you will do well to observe some abstinence beyond what is enjoined by the Church, for in addition to the ordinary benefits of fasting, namely, lifting up the mind, subduing the flesh, strengthening virtue, and earning an eternal recompense, it is a great matter to be able to command our tastes and inclinations, and to keep the body and its appetites subject to the law of the spirit: and even if we do not fast to any great extent, Satan is the more afraid of those who, he is aware, know how to fast."

— St. Francis de Sales

Our flesh and our spirit will be in tension until we breathe our last here on earth. We consider our appetites to be pesky, but nothing too serious, underestimating their power within us. Lenten fasts are an opportunity to discover what kind of hold they have in our lives. We quickly discover the bondage we were under when we take away these comforts. If I reach for chocolate or coffee every time I'm stressed, am I freely choosing to do so, or am I a slave to these coping mechanisms? By giving them up for 40 days, we have a chance to regain our freedom as sons and daughters of Christ.

	Did I ask the Lord what he wants to give me freedom from this Lent? How else can I recalibrate my appetites this Lent?				

"For me, prayer is a surge of the heart: it is a simple look turned toward heaven, it is a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy."

— *St. Therese of Lisieux* 

Prayer is not a cookie cutter experience. Sometimes we are jubilant and raise our arms to heaven with a triumphant, "Thank you Jesus!!" and other times, we may have no words to express our deepest sorrow and can only gasp, "Jesus, be with me." We also have beautiful vocal prayers and mental prayer practices. But what is prayer? St. Therese so beautifully describes it as a surge of the heart or a simple look toward heaven. Prayer doesn't have to be a complicated undertaking. It's a sweet conversation with the One whom my soul loves and who loves me infinitely more.

What is my attitude toward prayer?

"For you will always	have the poor	with you,	and when	ever you	will, you	can do	good to
	them; but y	ou will no	ot always h	nave me."			

— Mark 14:7

Sometimes we can be so frustrated with the injustices of our society. How can some people be so rich while others are living in dire poverty? We get angry and scream to end the injustice. While we try our hardest to alleviate the suffering of those around us, it is helpful to put things into perspective. Our interior disposition may need a change of heart. If we are too busy pointing fingers and getting angry about things that we have no control over, we may be neglecting our relationship with God and ignoring our role in creating both problems and responses. Our love for Him must always come first, which will in turn cause us to act out of a deep love for our neighbor. Much greater deeds will be accomplished if we look internally at our own hearts, and act in love, not anger.

What is my interior disposition toward the poor? Do I work tirelessly to alleviate their suffering because I see them as the person of Christ?				
engering e connec	eee mem me me person of ammen			

"Jesus then said to those Jews who believed in him, 'If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free."

— John 8:31-32

To remain in the word implies that we have already experienced it, and it's an invitation to linger a while longer. When we pray with the word, we encounter the Word of God himself. We come to him as we are, and he pours his Spirit into us. In the word, Jesus softens our hearts and gently uncovers the veil that is over our eyes. He allows us to see clearly. Jesus shows us how he wants to set us free from the lies that are limiting our freedom and hope. When we believe lies about ourselves and others, and about who God is, we empower the father of lies (John 8:44). When we believe the truth that Jesus speaks over us in his word, we open ourselves to the Truth Giver.

truths would you like to give me in exchange for these lies?					

"... 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.' I will rather boast most gladly of my weaknesses, in order that the power of Christ may dwell with me. Therefore, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and constraints, for the sake of Christ, for when I am weak, then I am strong."

— 2 Corinthians 12:9-10

When Paul asks God to remove his suffering, God says, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." Power. God is an all-powerful God. He isn't sitting back waiting for us to dutifully say our prayers to check our boxes for the day. God is waiting for our hearts. God's grace isn't hampered by our limitations or state of exhaustion, for it is in these things that He is able to display His power. Our Heavenly Father wants to show up for us. His goodness and power overflow when we invite Him into our weaknesses with a simple prayer from the heart. As soon as we reach out our hands to say, "Lord, I need you," we become strong.

Heavenly Father, how do you want to operate in power in me right now?	
	_
	_

"Human life is in some way a constant returning to our Father's house."

— St. Josemaria Escriva

Luke 15:20 says, "While he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him, and was filled with compassion. He ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him." When we decide to return to our Father after a period of self-sufficiency, He runs to us! Repentance often happens slowly within our hearts, but the mercy of our Heavenly Father speeds up when He sees us from afar. He seeks us most diligently when we are away from Him and when He catches the smallest sense of change in our hearts, our Heavenly Father begins making His home ready for us. The Father's house offers comfort and rest. He greets us with mercy and compassion. Oh, how His divine heart soars when we repent of our self-sufficiency and return to Him in the precious sacrament of reconciliation.

Close your eyes and imagine yourself walking down the dusty road back to your Father's house. What will you say to Him when you get there? What happens in your heart when

you see Him running to greet you? How does it feel to be wrapped up in His embrace? He puts a robe around your shoulders, sandals on your feet, and a ring on your finger. How does it feel to know that these items have been waiting specifically for you? They fit no one else. How does it feel to be home?

"Prayer without action grows into powerless pietism, and action without prayer degenerates into questionable manipulation. If prayer leads us into deeper unity with the compassionate Christ, it will always give rise to concrete acts of service."

— Henri Nouwen

Lent is a time for deep prayer and often our own spiritual and personal growth. What a beautiful season our Church gives us to grow deeper in our prayer life, cutting out distractions to focus more deeply on this relationship. It can sometimes be easy to forget that prayer goes beyond Mass, our personal time reading Scripture, or our time in front of the Blessed Sacrament in adoration. These forms of prayer are good and important to grow in our relationship with God. And, yet, our prayer cannot be merely a benefit for ourselves. We must put that Scripture or what God is putting into our hearts into action by showing God's love. We must share Christ with one another in the world, as we are commanded at the end of Mass each week.

How am I being called to put my prayer into action in my daily life?

#### "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

— *Matthew 22:39* 

We hear this verse so often that it's easy to skim over it without giving it much thought. But do we ever stop to ask ourselves if we are really loving ourselves? Have you noticed that Jesus never spoke a negative word about Himself? He let the Father speak His identity into Him, and He didn't step away from the truth of who He was. The Father is waiting to tell us who we are in Him. He wants the love that He is pouring into us to flow into others from the same place of abundance. We cannot have love of others but hatred of self. What seems to be love of neighbor without love of self creates codependency. What seems to be love of self without love of neighbor creates narcissism. To love our neighbor as ourselves, we first have to let God pour His life and identity into us.

"The proclamation of the death of Christ should never be disjoined from the announcement of His resurrection."

— Sofia Cavalletti

The Paschal Mystery is one of the great mysteries we ponder during Lent. How can it be that the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus and His sending forth of the Holy Spirit are not only a series of events, but one singular event? We can't say, "Christ has died," without immediately following up with, "And He has risen." For without one, we couldn't have the other. They are one and the same mystery. Yet, sometimes we focus on these events in isolation. We become death-people who are stuck in the cycle of negativity without hope. Or we become resurrection-people who focus on how we've transformed in Christ, but we forget where we started, and we lose empathy for others in the process. Christ's death doesn't make sense without the resurrection. And His resurrection doesn't make sense without His death. Our Lenten fasting and almsgiving should move us to contemplate what we are dying to and who we are rising into at the same time.

Father, what is something I need to die to or let go of so that I can truly live?					

Yet even now, return to me with your whole heart, with fasting, weeping, and mourning. Rend your hearts, not your garments, and return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, and relenting in punishment.

— Joel 2: 12-13

Even now. There is so much weight in these words. Maybe you started the beginning of Lent with habits for your good, but you fell off track. It's not too late. Now it the time to begin again. Maybe you forgot who you were and walked the wrong way for a while. Even now. He is saying, "Return to me with your whole heart." Is there something that is distracting you and taking a part of your heart along with it? He isn't waiting for the conditions in your life to be perfect. He is inviting you to come now, with your heart as it is. Now is the perfect time.

you approach show you?	ed Him right nov	w as you are, w	hich one of the	se promises do y	you need Him to
,					

"Jesus went around to all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and curing every disease and illness. At the sight of the crowds, his heart was moved with pity for them because they were troubled and abandoned, like sheep without a shepherd."

— *Matthew 9:35-36* 

His heart was moved with pity. Another translation of this passages uses the word "compassion," which comes from the Greek word "splagchnon." "Splagchnon" means "from the bowels." Jesus experienced deep, gut-wrenching compassion for the people who needed Him. Instead of giving and moving on with His day, He allowed the crowds to move him in a physical way. Almsgiving can be transformative. When we are moved with gut-wrenching compassion for people, a part of our heart changes. We recognize that we have something to offer to the people in need, but they also have something to offer us.

transform	your heart?			

"I will sprinkle clean water over you to make you clean; from all your impurities and from all your idols, I will cleanse you. I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you so that you walk in my statutes, observe my ordinances, and keep them."

— Ezekiel 36:25-27

Fasting is an ordering of our loves. When we fast, the eyes of our heart open and we can see our idols exposed for what they are. Sister Miriam James Heidland, SOLT, said, "If we don't break our idols in the name of Jesus Christ, they eventually break us." When we find ourselves feeling broken and in need of new life, we can rest in the promises from the Lord in this passage. He has the power to break us from our idols. He is giving us a new heart and a new spirit. He is taking away our hearts of stone so He can replace them with hearts of flesh that are beating and fully alive. He is pouring His spirit into us to empower us to walk freely in His name.

"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.

"The greatest challenge of the day is: how to bring about a revolution of the heart, a revolution which has to start with each one of us."

— Dorothy Day

This is one of the more popular quotes by Dorothy Day, a woman who lived her deep faith and prayer through service. Our Church gives us a weekly, even daily, chance to begin a revolution of our heart each time we receive the Eucharist. When we receive Christ in the Eucharist, we are changed. We are asked to take what we have received into the world. Eucharist is not a personal prayer and devotion; it is communal by its very nature. Sometimes it can feel very personal, and each of us has our own unique relationship with Christ which is very important. But Christ was not insular. He was with the poor and marginalized in every aspect of his ministry. Christ shared his body and blood with us, and through that we could continue to live this work. We continue to live the Gospel with the fortification of the Eucharist. Dorothy Day's call, likewise, was not a merely individual call. While she looks at each of us as individuals, it was a call for each of us to continual conversion for the greater good of all of Christ's people, persons who are also part of one Body.

What revolution is being called from your heart this Lent?	

"The one thing necessary is a true interior and spiritual life, true growth, on my own, in depth, in a new direction. Whatever new direction God opens up for me. My job is to press forward, to grow interiorly, to pray, to break away from attachments and to defy fears, to grow in faith, which has its own solitude, to seek an entirely new perspective and new dimension in my life. To open up new horizons at any cost. To desire this and let the Holy Spirit take care of the rest. But really to desire this and work for it."

— A Year with Thomas Merton

Merton's full trust in God and time spent in deep prayer to be open to the Spirit's movement in his life can feel a little daunting. Merton lived as monk, spending much of his daily life in prayer. Most of us can't spend quite so much time in silence listening to where God is calling. But while not everyone is called to his kind of life, that doesn't exempt us from this same essential call: to do the deep work, to pray, to follow where God is calling, and to trust fully. We must find our own ways and time for this important work.

"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?					

"Seeing the sun, the moon and the stars, I said to myself, 'Who could be the Master of these beautiful things?' I felt a great desire to see him, to know him and to pay him homage."

— Saint Josephine Bakhita

Josephine Bakhita was enslaved at a young age, taken from her family as a young girl and sold multiple times over her 12 years of enslavement. Her life shows us that suffering does not separate us from Christ. While we cannot gloss over the trauma and tragedy in our lives, St. Josephine reminds us that God is with us all the time, even (and especially) in the midst of our own turbulent life moments. Before she even knew of God, she felt God — noticing the beautiful creation around her, reveling in that beauty prayerfully, before she even knew how to pray. We too can look to the simple things that are in front of us daily as a reminder of Christ's love for us — the moon and stars in the sky, a hug from a loved one, a smile from a stranger passing by, a fresh layer of snow or the first blooms of new life in our garden. God's love is shown to us in big and obvious ways, like in the Eucharist, but also in the small ways we might overlook.

What small ways am I noticing God's presence in my life?

"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 research and prayed about which charitable organizations would best benefit from my contributions.					

"If we really understand the Eucharist, if we really center our lives on Jesus' Body and Blood, if we nourish our lives with the Bread of the Eucharist, it will be easy for us to see Christ in that hungry one next door, the one lying in the gutter, the alcoholic man we shun, our husband or our wife, or our restless child. For in them, we will recognize the distressing disguises of the poor: Jesus in our midst."

— St. Teresa of Calcutta

The Eucharist can feel like a safe space for us. It is one thing people generally appreciate about the Catholic Mass — its familiarity. Even if you are attending Mass across the world in a language you don't speak, you can likely feel the comfortable flow of the liturgy that has become familiar to us. But we aren't meant to remain in that comfortable space. We are called to go out and meet those around us and welcome all we meet as Christ. This is what Eucharist is, a place of comfort and strength to fortify us to meet the challenges of our day, to encounter everybody we meet as Christ himself and recognize the dignity of all people.

Where do you feel challenged to meet Christ in your life today? How can a deeper understanding of the Eucharist help you to see Jesus in your midst?					

"Every time you visit the Church for the love of Christ, His heart draws us in an embrace of sheer delight."

— St. Margaret Mary Alacoque

What an amazing image to think that simply by showing up and walking through the doors of the church we are drawn into a hug from Jesus! And that it isn't just us who are happy to receive that embrace, but Jesus himself is so delighted that we came. He longs for us to visit, not for His sake, but for ours. How lovely to be longed for.

Who is the last person you greeted with delight? What other doors might you walk through where you can bring the embrace of Jesus with you? Who might need a spiritual hug right now? Enfold them with your prayers today.

"Christ has no body now but mine. He prays in me, works in me, looks through my eyes, speaks through my words, works through my hands, walks with my feet and loves with me here."

— St. Teresa of Ávila

When we receive the Eucharist, we are transformed. When we participate in this transformation, we become more Christ-like. Just like St. Teresa of Ávila, Christ lives through us — we must take up the Gospel. This is echoed through the mission statement of the Diocese of St. Cloud, "Our mission is to be His heart of mercy, voice of hope, and hands of justice." We are invited constantly by God to draw closer and to help build the reign of God here on earth. We must let the transformation happen and support it. Just like a plant cannot grow to its full potential without sun, water, the right nutrients and pruning, we cannot grow without prayer, contemplation, a deep relationship with Christ, and living out our faith through our actions and relationships. Lent gives us the opportunity to enter more deeply into the care and growth of our own transformation, which is to continue each day even after the season ends.

In what areas ar	In what areas am I being called to grow so that Christ can live in me more deeply?					

"We become what we love and who we love shapes what we become. If we love things, we become a thing. If we love nothing, we become nothing. Imitation is not a literal mimicking of Christ; rather, it means becoming the image of the beloved, an image disclosed through transformation. This means we are to become vessels of God's compassionate love for others."

— St. Clare of Assisi

If the major love of our life is things, we become like a thing. Losing focus on the heart and soul, we begin to view the people around us as means to an end without any thought or care for their welfare. If we love nothing, we can feel safe. We don't run the risk of rejection and having our hearts broken, but God knows that we find ourselves when we give ourselves away. Each one of us has a unique call from God that we can't find by imitating or mimicking someone else. Jesus tells us in John 17:26, "I made known to them your name and I will make it known, that the love with which you loved me may be in them and I in them." God is love. His desire is that His love is in us and that we become vessels of His compassionate love for others.

#### Excerpts from Psalm 118:

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, his mercy endures forever.

*In danger I called on the Lord; the Lord answered me and set me free.* 

The Lord is with me; I am not afraid; what can mortals do against me?

The Lord is with me as my helper; I shall look in triumph on my foes.

The Lord, my strength and might, has become my savior. I shall not die but live and declare the deeds of the Lord.

This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice in it and be glad.

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, his mercy endures forever.

Psalm 118 is likely one of the hymns that Jesus sang with his disciples at the Last Supper, right before going into the Garden of Gethsemane. This psalm is used for a king and his people as they approach the temple. The psalmist describes how the people reached out to God for help when their lives were threatened, and God came to rescue them.



