

by Joan Mitchell, CSJ

Lent lasts 40 days, a mini version of the 40 years the ancient Israelites spent in the desert. Desert time transforms the Hebrew slaves into God's own covenant-keeping people. In 40 days our habits and hearts can also change. Anyone who has quit smoking knows the cravings lessen after the first month.

Lent invites us to spring clean our lives, throw out the rubbish, and reclaim the spirit within that appreciates being alive, in love with family and friends, and engaged with neighbors. Lent always poises us between temptation and transfiguration, inviting us to identify what trivializes or demeans us and to set our sights on what awakens our spirits.

Lent is not just about trying harder, getting leaner or cleaner.

Lent is about recognizing we live in communion with all that is. Lent is the Church's springtime in which we rediscover the reality of the holy that abounds and surrounds us, within and around us.

Lent is a yearly awakening to the faith relationship in which we Christians live—the mystery of Jesus' self-giving death and life-giving resurrection. As Earth awakens to spring, Lent calls us to wake up in our lives to new life and cultivate deeper consciousness of God's love at our fingertips. The word *resurrection* means *wakening*.

LENT

40 Days of Awakening

Plant a tree, a bush, or a prairie
Make someone laugh Say, "I'm sorry"
Try not to waste anything for one whole day
Join neighbors in a clean-up project
Send a crocus to someone from whom you are estranged
Ask God to do what is best for the public person you dislike most



Share with someone how you pray Cement a friendship Read *Mountains Beyond Mountains* or *Half the Sky* during Lent
Call someone who is lonely Help without being asked
Resist trying to be the center of attention Be a shoulder to cry on
Go to a lecture, hear a concert, see a play Be patient with others
Refuse to gossip Refuse to whine Readily forgive anyone who hurts you
Surprise yourself Make sure your financial investments are socially responsible
If you love someone, say so Advocate on behalf of social issues such as affordable housing
Thank God for the gift of life Pray for a friend
Pray for an enemy Find out what a dollar will buy in Peru or Zambia
Visit a shut-in Give away all your "extras" Listen to understand others' points of view
Visit a church you pass regularly Examine your

conscience Be a peacemaker at work
Spend silent time alone Affirm colleagues' work
Refuse to judge or categorize others Be a sign of hope for someone who is depressed
Recognize the truth about yourself—no matter how good it is
Imagine peace Talk with a person a generation older or younger
Love a little more



SUNDAY
by Sunday

2011

Each Lent we turn again to the Church's ancient practices for awakening our often-complacent spirits. We pray, fast, and give alms. We seek to deepen our faith in Jesus' promise of new life and his claim on us for the transformation of our world.

A little time apart to pray can restore resilience to our productive selves and give us a chance to breathe air and smell cherry blossoms for free.

We fast to break our routines and test how life-giving they are. We take time from what dulls and drags us in order to find time for inner musing, heart healing, people too-long unheard.

In giving alms we learn the needs of others, stretch our resources to contribute to their well-being, and work for just public policies.

Lent is a season for winter hearts to melt, regenerate, and turn to our commitment as Easter people. We believe that like Jesus' love our love gives life.

Pray the prayers below for each week of Lent. The prayers take their themes from the Lenten Sunday gospels.

Awaken Anew This



PRAY

Rejoice and never cease praying; offer constant thanks.

Thessalonians 5:16-18

EXAMINE YOUR CONSCIOUSNESS at the end of each day of Lent. Sit or walk. Breathe in, and breathe out. Ask yourself where and how you experienced God's presence throughout the day. Who comes to mind as you remember the day? Which memories excite or energize you? Where do these stirrings lead? Which memories trouble you, perhaps repeatedly, or gnaw at your compassion to act? Do any regrets surface that you can act upon?

Ask: Where is God in this day? What does God desire of me? What do I desire of God? Pray with thanksgiving and openness to the stirrings of the Spirit in your mind and heart.

BUILD AWARENESS of the need to live simply and sustainably. Shut off the lights, computers, television. Play games by candlelight, or have a family

member read a story or poetry aloud. Take time to form a prayer circle, express what you appreciate about each family member, and thank God for one another.

LISTEN ATTENTIVELY to a spouse or child or friend for 15 to 30 minutes. Make no comments positive or negative; give no advice. Just give the gift of listening. Ask questions to clarify only. Attentive listening can help a person sort out a problem or recognize a desire or direction simply by hearing it aloud.

REFLECT on the Sunday Lenten gospels. They immerse us in conversations that lead to *aha* moments. Jesus asks a woman at a well for a drink and starts talking about a well within and water that gushes up toward eternal life (John 4). A man born blind finds he sees with eyes of faith and speaks with words of faith as teachers and neighbors press him to explain his new sight (John 9). Talking with Jesus stretches Mary and Martha to believe he is resurrection and life (John 11).

MAKE AN ONLINE RETREAT and pray the daily prayer at goodgroundpress.com.

JESUS, you teach us to resist temptations to dazzle and impress others and instead live and trust God's word. Help us recognize we share your life-giving power in our capacity to love one another. Amen.

Week 1

Matthew 4:1-11

TRANSFORM our purpose, life-giving God. Reveal to us our part in making the human community whole. Walk with us from insight to action. Amen.

Week 2

Matthew 17:1-9

GOD of all that is, you call us to talk to one another in spirit and truth and to let the aspirations that well up in others' hearts challenge and expand our own. Bless all who bring new understanding of old enemies to their own people. Amen.

Week 3

John 4:5-42

s Lent

WALK with family or friends. Name the spring plants you see. Visit a garden, a conservatory, a nature center, or a labyrinth. Pay attention to Earth coming to life—the grass, the flowers, the birds, the lengthening days. Talk about your discoveries and offer thanks together for all you see.

CLAIM BRIEF SOLITUDES, moments, minutes, hours of silence. Practice silence by turning off the radio and TV. Extend silence by taking walks. Take time where horizons open your eyes to new possibilities.

PARTICIPATE IN DAILY EUCHARIST with your parish community or a community where you work. Read and reflect on the gospel of the day.



FAST

This is the fast I seek: release the captive; free the yoked; feed the hungry; shelter the oppressed and homeless; clothe the naked.

Isaiah 58.6-7

Fasting forces us to abandon wasteful habits and to do without,

so that we have more to share. Fasting fosters solidarity with the millions of our planet who go without sufficient food.

FAST BETWEEN MEALS.

Restrict nibbling. This is a common and worthy way to fast that puts food in proper relationship to other events of the day.

FEAST ON APPRECIATING FAMILY MEMBERS. Hold hands and form a circle around each family member in turn. Pray blessings for each.

FAST FROM EATING ON THE RUN. Make family meals a priority this Lent. When we eat together, more than food passes between us. We share meat and meaning, difficulties and delights. We create bonds and strengthen relationships.

Commit as a family to eating together at least twice a week during Lent.

FAST FROM OLD HURTS, imagined enemies, overwork, sarcasm, self-pity, and self-righteousness. Pursue happiness. Embrace new relationships and new

dimensions to long-lasting friendships. Attend to others' needs, welcome their insights and share your own. Talk more, or talk less.

FEAST ON READING the *Omnivore's Dilemma* to explore where our food comes from and how your family might grow more of your food or buy it locally.

FAST FROM TV. Television absorbs almost 40% of the average American's free time. Take some of that time back and use it to play games with your family, visit across the back fence with a neighbor, or go to a meeting where your voice needs to be heard on behalf of children, poor families, or those without homes.

DIG UP A GARDEN SPACE or prepare a good size pot to grow one plant that will bear fruit you can eat, for example, a tomato.

VISIT seedsavers.org to learn about planting heirloom seeds, raising and exchanging seeds with other gardeners.

JESUS, you use mud and water to give a blind man sight. Open our senses to God's presence. May our eyes see all that is of God in our midst. May we find words to name the Spirit's holy stirrings in our lives. Amen.

Week 4

John 9.1-41

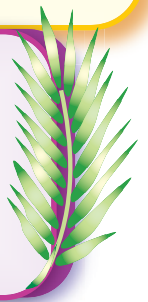
JESUS, you come among us as a friend who does not exempt himself from feeling loss and experiencing death. With Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, may we trust you are resurrection and life. Amen.

Week 5

John 11.1-45

LET our attitude be Christ's. May our love give life. Amen

Palm/Passion Sunday





GIVE ALMS

Pure religion in the eyes of God our Father is this: coming to the aid of orphans and widows and the poor when they need it. James 1.27

Almsgiving challenges us to give of our treasure, time, talents, and energy. Almsgiving is a work of justice, not an option for the Christian.

MAKE AN ALMS BOX AT HOME. Decorate it with symbols expressing the value and joy of sharing. Collect money saved from skipping desserts, from meatless meals, from movies not rented. Plan to place your alms in your parish's Holy Thursday collection.

KEEP COMPASSION ALIVE. What is one small need in the news to which you can respond?

CHECK OUT Catholicrelief.org to broaden your Lenten focus beyond our borders. Contribute to Operation Rice Bowl.

REACH OUT and make life more welcoming for others. Visit a shut-in or prisoner. Take food to a local foodshelf. Volunteer to serve in a soup kitchen. Who in the parish, neighborhood, or family would welcome a ride to the store, a friendly visit, a call, or an invitation to share a meal?

SIMPLIFY YOUR LIFE. Do you have more clothes than you need? What items in your home can you do without and give to others? How can you concretely share with people in need?

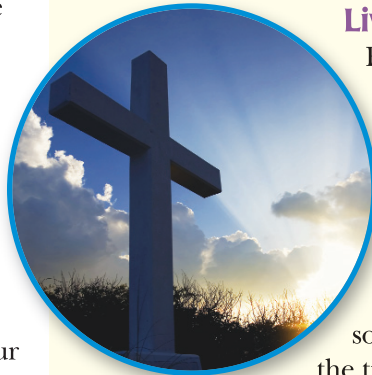
COMPOST YOUR LIFE as Earth does when it turns garbage and grass clippings into rich humus for growing flowers and vegetables. Turn little-used talents, extra dollars, or new free time into a project that grows benefits for your neighbors, local or global.

VISIT the Equal Exchange Interfaith Program to explore using fair trade products such as coffee, tea, and nuts—equalexchange.com/interfaith.

CONTRIBUTE to Doctors Without Borders that treats malnutrition in the 70 countries where they serve. www.doctorswithoutborders.org.

LENT: Season of the Cross

The cross expresses the mystery of Jesus' death out of love for us and the failure of people like us, including his disciples, to recognize who he was. The cross is a place of defeat and despair, yet a place of triumph, a tree of shame and a tree of life. Make the cross a Lenten symbol in your home to express your openness to conversion and rebirth.



Living Cross

Erect a cross of twigs or branches in a pot of soil. Take a cutting from an ivy or other climbing vine and root it in the pot. As the plant grows, it will encircle and climb the cross—a living example of Jesus as the source of life and of the cross as the tree of life.

Prayer Cross

Create a cross shape out of wood or cardboard. Watch newspapers and magazines for photos of people who are suffering in our world and for whom you want to pray this Lent. Paste the photos on the wood or cardboard to make a prayer cross. Add to the cross pictures of people you hold in your heart and for whom you wish to pray. Place your cross on the table where you eat or another place where you will see it daily. Plan to make a donation as a family or group to alleviate one kind of suffering you focus on this Lent.

Holding Opposites Together

Create a cross shape out of wood or cardboard. Use the intersection of two planes in every cross to explore the opposites in your life or the life of your family. Have family members use words or symbols to name opposites. Put positives on the up and down plane of the cross. Put negatives across. Reflect as a family on what your cross tells you about your lives together. What is giving each family member energy? What is exhausting family members? What is good about holding opposites together?

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