

LENTEN DAYS

a guide for a simple and intentional Lent together

all souls
CHARLOTTESVILLE

WHY LENT?

Beginning on Ash Wednesday when we are marked with ashes and hear the words “from dust you came and to dust you will return,” we begin a 40-day journey toward Easter. Lent’s 40 days reflect Israel’s 40 years wandering in the wilderness as well as Jesus’ 40 days in the wilderness where Jesus overcome Satan’s temptation. Following God, overcoming evil and pursuing joy are things we must do together – and work we can do only because of the power of our Living Christ who has overcome evil and enacted joy on our behalf. Before we can experience the joy of resurrection, we must reckon with the despair of death. We need this season of examination, restraint and preparation. In Lent, we remember that we are mortal humans, that we are destined to, one day, die – and that we grapple with sin.

In Lent, we lean forward toward our hope in Jesus who, through his cross and resurrection, defeated death, forgave all our sins and inaugurated the work of new creation for the entire cosmos. Lent comes from a Saxon word meaning “length” and refers to springtime when our days are lengthening, growing brighter and warmer. In our part of the world, we enjoy how the very earth around us prepares to birth new life, and we too prepare to birth new Easter life.

It's not about feeling gloomy for forty days; it's not about making yourself miserable for forty days; it's not even about giving things up for forty days. Lent is springtime. It's preparing for that great climax of springtime which is Easter – new life bursting through death.

Rowan Williams

Lent offers a time of self-examination, listening, preparation and repentance. It’s a time of winnowing, of withdrawal, of limitation. It’s crucial that we have 40 days for this vital work. It’s rare for us to purposely curb our appetites and rare for us to intently consider the gravity of our sin and our yearning for grace. This is why Lent often involves choosing some practice – an ordered way to obey the Spirit’s voice in our life and a way to practice, in our bodies, attentiveness to God. We need to embrace grace with our bodies, not only our minds. With this eye toward grace, Lent’s focus is not on us or our sin. Our focus is on Jesus, on mercy and renewal. Repentance leads us to the joy of forgiveness. This is why the 40 days of Lent do not include Sundays. Each Sunday celebrates resurrection. Each Sunday a mini-Easter.

A COMMUNITY PRACTICING REPENTANCE, SIMPLICITY AND PRAYER

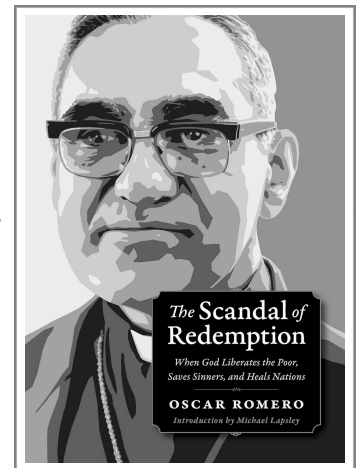
Practicing Lent is a communal affair. Conversation and prayer with others is vital. Lent is a journey ‘we’ take, not only a journey ‘I’ take. In the church’s life, Lent, as a season of the community’s penitent preparation, has long been a time for increased emphasis on practicing our faith together: *fasting* (chastening our impulses as we foster our hunger for God), *prayer* (communion with God), *solitude* (nurturing space for wholeness in God), and *almsgiving* (acts of mercy and solidarity with the poor or oppressed).

These practices guide us toward simplicity, pruning our life so we have the capacity for the great joy of Resurrection to come. If these practices overwhelm you or feel like simply more work, then step back and reconsider. Ask for help. Lent leads us toward freedom, toward joy.

COMMUNAL LENTEN PRACTICES

- + **Fasting:** on either Wednesdays or Fridays (evening to evening or sunup to sundown—or whatever you are able to do), we will enter a water-only fast. Allow these limitations, this simplicity, be our response to God, a response to our needs and the needs of our neighbors, a response of bodily solidarity with those who are impoverished or in need of God’s liberation.
- + **Daily Scriptures and Prayer:** as you are able, we invite you to join with us and our friends at the Order of St. Anthony for daily morning and evening prayer via Zoom (9am EST and 10pm EST). A link, as well as additional daily readings and prayers can be found at allsoulscville.com/dailyprayer
- + **Lenten Read:** pick up a copy of “The Scandal of Redemption: When God Liberates the Poor, Saves Sinners, and Heals Nations (Plough Spiritual Guides: Backpack Classics) by Oscar Romero. Read through it this Lent and gather with us the week of the 17th for a discussion

About the book: *“Three short years transformed El Salvador’s Archbishop Oscar Romero from a defender of the status quo into one of the most outspoken voices of the oppressed. An assassin’s bullet ended his life, but his message lives on. These selections from Romero’s diaries and radio broadcasts invite each of us to align our own lives with the way of Jesus that lifts up the poor, welcomes the broken, wins over enemies, and transforms the history of entire nations.”*



DISCERNING AN INDIVIDUAL PRACTICE

Since practicing our faith is best done in community, consider these practices the church does together. Some desire to choose a personal practice, a helpful way of practicing repentance, a turning to God’s wide, healing love. Even here, though, discern this with others. Ask those who know you best to help you prayerfully consider what God may be inviting you into, what may be restorative for your soul. Then converse with one another during Lent – allow this to be a shared experience; allow it to be light for your soul.

Lent is the period which, learning to abstain from adoring at the shrine of the self, we come to see beyond the divinity we have made of ourselves to the divine will for all the world.

– Joan Chittister

In addition to traditional food fasts, other examples of fasts or spiritual practices are listed on the back:

- + If God is prompting you to reject pride, choose some discipline emphasizing silence when you would normally draw attention to yourself with your words.
- + If the Spirit is prompting you to release fear, meditate on a passage where Jesus speaks against fear – and find someone to whom you can show concrete acts of love.
- + What do you find yourself addicted to, a thief of joy? (food, alcohol, guilt, legalism, shame, control, perfectionism, laziness, fear, sex, power, attention, etc.?) How can you say ‘no’ to this thief?
- + If God is prompting you to receive joy and abandon guilt or shame, break one rule or taboo each week
- + For generosity, give away \$10 weekly.
- + For simplicity, say “no” to all but essential duties.
- + For solitude, cut off the internet/phone at 6:00 p.m.

Here are questions you could use to discern what God may be saying to you:

- + How is Jesus calling me into deepened intimacy and communion with the God of joy?
- + How is Jesus inviting me to be more truly myself?
- + Where does your heart feel heavy, and what would encourage you toward light and joy?
- + What does repentance from things that kill your joy look like for you in this season?

ALWAYS GRACE

We will not shy away from this reflective path, but we will remember that we are moving toward joy and life (Easter). Of course, this is true – because we are moving toward God. “There is no condemnation toward those who are in Christ Jesus.” No condemnation.

If any of these practices inflict a heavy yoke, this is not God’s way for you. It may be rigorous. It may strain your spiritual muscles, and it may require intentionality and effort, but God’s way never weighs you down with self-effort. If you need to talk with someone, our pastors and elders are eager to walk with you. If you get off track, don’t worry. Just re-engage wherever you are. And sometimes mid-course corrections are where some of the best work happens.

Receive grace. Turn from the small story of self and sin. Walk toward joy. This is Lent’s invitation.