

LENTEN GRACE

Daily Gospel Reflections



by the Daughters of St. Paul

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Lenten grace : daily Gospel reflections / by the Daughters of Saint Paul.

p. cm.

ISBN 0-8198-4525-6 (pbk.)

1. Lent—Prayers and devotions.
2. Catholic Church—Prayers and devotions.
3. Bible N.T. Gospels—Meditations. I. Daughters of St. Paul.

BX2170.L4L47 2008

242'.34—dc22

2008025737

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Cover design by Rosana Usselman

Cover photo: Mary Emmanuel Alves, FSP

Interior photos: Armanda L. Santos, FSP, and Mary Emmanuel Alves, FSP, © Daughters of St. Paul

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Published by Pauline Books & Media, 50 Saint Paul's Avenue, Boston, MA 02130-3491

Printed in the U.S.A.

www.pauline.org

Pauline Books & Media is the publishing house of the Daughters of St. Paul, an international congregation of women religious serving the Church with the communications media.

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How to Use This Book



“Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening” (1 Sam 3:9).

Lent is a “favorable time” (cf. Is 49:8), a time of abundant grace that draws us toward God and away from the darkness of sin.

In these pages, various members of the Daughters of St. Paul share moments of joy and insight through prayer with Scripture. Our Founder, Blessed James Alberione, encouraged such prayer, saying, “The person who nourishes himself or herself on the Word of the Bible . . . will be penetrated by the Holy Spirit.” The Word of God presented to us in the liturgy during Lent is especially rich and favorable to deeper prayer and contemplation.

Following the Gospel reading for each day of Lent, these reflections are based on *Lectio Divina* (“holy reading”), which is a way of praying with Scripture. Many methods of doing this have developed since the time of early monasticism. Here, the sisters use a simple framework that allows the Word of God to make room in our minds and hearts.

The first step, *Lectio* (“reading”), is to read the day’s Gospel passage from a missal or Bible. Read it a few times slowly, perhaps especially noticing the phrase or verse that is listed under the *Meditatio* section.

Next, the *Meditatio* (“meditation”) expands the meaning of this phrase and explores what it is saying to us today—what

God is asking of us, or challenging us to, or offering to us. After reading the meditation, take as much time as you like to reflect on it.

The *Oratio* (“prayer”) can help you talk to God about what has arisen in your heart, so that the time of prayer becomes a conversation, not just a time to think. God has spoken in the Scripture. We hear the invitation in our meditation, but now a response is called for. Our response is not just to say, “Yes, I want to do as you are asking me,” but also to say, “Help me do it, Lord!”

The short line under *Contemplatio* (“contemplation”) is a way of extending this time of prayer into life. You can silently repeat it throughout the day to help deepen the intimacy with the Lord that you experienced in prayer.

May your Lent be grace-filled and abundantly blessed!

Liturgical Calendar



Note to the reader: The weekday readings during Lent are the same from year to year, but the Sunday readings follow a three-year cycle (A, B, or C) as indicated in the following chart:

YEAR	CYCLE
2009	Cycle B
2010	Cycle C
2011	Cycle A
2012	Cycle B
2013	Cycle C
2014	Cycle A
2015	Cycle B
2016	Cycle C
2017	Cycle A
2018	Cycle B
2019	Cycle C
2020	Cycle A
2021	Cycle B
2022	Cycle C

*Come out to the desert,
that place of silence and patience.
Come listen to the voice of God.*



Ash Wednesday



Lectio

Matthew 6:1–6, 16–18

Meditatio

“... [Do not] perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them
... your Father who sees in secret will repay you.”

“What are you going to do for Lent?” As children each year we had to answer this question. We gave up cookies, candy, TV, video games...; the list was made up of our most precious pleasures. We struggled through the forty days of Lent, flexing our spiritual muscles as we raced toward the Easter Day finish line. As adults we’ve settled into a more sophisticated Lenten spirituality, but often we end up giving up the same things we did as kids, perhaps hoping to lose a little weight or gain a little time.

Today’s Gospel reading prods us to go deeper. It centers around theatrics. We all are mini-celebrities of our own lives, imagining a trail of adoring fans following us. We can even make Lent into a minor Hollywood production. We conceive the idea for our Lenten penance. We write the script. We are producer, director, actor, and audience all wrapped in one. And we end up at the Easter Day finish line as self-absorbed as we were on Ash Wednesday.

Perhaps these words of Jesus spoken to us today are asking us to go backstage, take the last seat, sit down, and wait for God to reveal to us the script he has written for us this Lent. Perhaps as adults we should be asking at the beginning of Lent: What is God going to do for me in these next forty days? What is it that I desire God to do for me in this long Lenten retreat?

Instead of theatrics, Jesus is inviting us to simple honesty. To smallness. To just being there and sensing his grace, quiet enough, still enough to feel the gentle tugs of the Spirit to newness, to giving up obstacles to the growth of a treasured relationship, to finding a few moments daily to read the Word of God, to surrender fear. . . . What God is going to do in your life will surprise you. Expect it.

Oratio

Jesus, I am not accustomed to telling you to do whatever you want in my life. In fact, it's kind of scary to see what you would do if I let you write my life's script. I think I am doing a pretty good job at my life on my own. But it seems you want something more of me now. Instead of Lent being *my* focus, you are placing me front and center in *your* focus. I am expecting you to show me what you want to give me at this stage of my life. I trust you.

Contemplatio

I expect you, God, to do something with me this Lent.

Thursday after Ash Wednesday



Lectio

Luke 9:22–25

Meditatio

*“If anyone wishes to come after me, he must . . .
take up his cross daily and follow me.”*

Today’s Gospel challenges us to true discipleship, to follow a Messiah who defies all our human expectations. In the verses immediately preceding today’s Gospel, Jesus asks his disciples, “. . . who do you say that I am?” Peter replies, “The Messiah of God” (v. 20). In this context of Peter’s confession of faith, Jesus defines the kind of Messiah he is, challenging Peter (and each of us) to a deeper faith. Jesus reminds us that he did not choose to come into our world in glory and triumph. Instead, he chose to come into the world as a suffering Messiah who would be rejected, killed, and raised on the third day.

Jesus calls his disciples to follow in his footsteps and to take up our cross *daily*. . . . That word “daily” stands out for me. Jesus is asking us for commitment—a resolute decision to carry our cross—not just through this season of Lent, or when big sufferings come our way, but *every day*. Yet how are we to do this?

For those of us seeking to live the Christian life, we won't have to look far to find the cross. We are called to *daily* lay down our lives by letting go of our own preferences, desires, strong opinions. We make choices for the sake of Christ and his Gospel and not on the basis of our own immediate feelings or reactions. On any given day, this may mean many things. Perhaps it will mean setting aside my own need for recognition while seeking to encourage others in their gifts, or choosing not to act out of feelings of anger when a family member says something that hurts. In each circumstance, we are called to choose Christ and to place the good of others before our own. Yet the cross never has the last word! With every death to self, the cross leads to resurrection and new life in Christ.

Oratio

Jesus, I do not always understand your ways. Sometimes, your cross feels like folly to me. Why would you choose suffering and death over triumph and glory? Teach me the mystery of your ways, and how to choose the good of others before my own. This Lent, I renew my commitment to carry my cross daily. May this laying down of my life unite me with you and bring life to others, allowing me to share more deeply in your Easter joy. For if I die with you, I will also live with you.

Contemplatio

“For to me, ‘life’ is Christ . . . ” (Phil 1:21).

Friday after Ash Wednesday

Lectio

Matthew 9:14–15

Meditatio

“Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them?”

Today’s reference to the bridegroom is one of many uses of marriage imagery in the Gospels. Jesus refers to himself as the “bridegroom” and tells a parable about a king who threw a wedding banquet for his son. In another passage, the familiar story of the wise and foolish virgins also centers on the arrival of the bridegroom. Those who were ready went in with him to celebrate the wedding feast. In John’s Gospel the Baptist declares: “The one who has the bride is the bridegroom; the best man, who stands and listens for him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice. So this joy of mine has been made complete” (Jn 3:29). A major wedding connection is also made in the Gospel of John with the marriage feast at Cana, when Jesus turned water into wine. In the Old Testament we find the Song of Songs and, in the prophets, the heart-rending love God has for his people who turned away from him adulterously to follow false idols.

Augustine also used this nuptial imagery, speaking of Jesus’ coming into the world in terms of marriage. For

Augustine this imagery of bride and bridegroom is a symbol of Jesus' spousal desire for us, his love that blindly gives itself over to union whatever the cost, the beginning of a love affair born in eternity, to be consummated on the marriage bed of the cross, and finally raised in glory to the right hand of the Father.

When disciples fast today, it is a fasting of faith because Jesus has ascended into heaven. More than the lack of food, it is the absence of the sight of the bridegroom. It is a continual search for him and a longing for his return. Fasting from food, from TV, from complaining, or whatever else we decide to fast from, is a discipline that helps us keep focused on why we are here: we are invited to a forever wedding feast, not simply as a guest, but as the bride.

Oratio

Jesus, when we could not come to you, you came to us to forge an unbreakable bond between us and God, a bond of love that will last for eternity. At the beginning of these days of penitence, I feel this bond strengthening. I feel that you care about me and my life. I feel that you want me to realize how close you are to me. Help me to let go of whatever habits have become obstacles to living in your presence.

Contemplatio

You have come into the world as to a marriage.

Saturday after Ash Wednesday



Lectio

Luke 5:27–32

Meditatio

*“Then Levi gave a great banquet for him in his house,
and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were at table with them.”*

Could I entertain Jesus in my house tonight? Who would I invite? Who would just show up? Would I have the nerve—or the courage—to call the usual crowd? Or would I try to reinvent myself for this occasion? How long would I try to sustain the act?

We sometimes say that God “takes us where we’re at.” Do I truly come to prayer “as I am”? Do I allow the Lord into the living room of my heart with all the inhabitants that have taken up residence there? If I’m honest with myself I have to admit that an odd assortment of people live in my memory.

There are, of course, the people whom I cherish and whose lives are intertwined with my own: family members and close friends. Near or far, living or deceased, these loved ones live in my thoughts and prayers. It is good. On the other hand, there are others, less welcome, who invade my imagination and memory. An unsightly assortment of ghosts and skeletons clutter my mental landscape and distract me from

the conversation I wish to have with Jesus. Or do they? What would happen if I brought Jesus into the place where arguments, manipulation, and betrayals lurk and periodically replay themselves?

“Those who are healthy do not need a physician, but the sick do.” To his credit, Levi invited Jesus to his house and introduced him to the people he typically sat down to dinner with. Other people murmured (of course), but Jesus came anyway and was perfectly at ease at Levi’s table.

Perhaps I need an honest heart-to-heart with God about the people that I live with in the “real world” as well as those who populate my “inner world.”

Oratio

Jesus, come into the house of my heart. Walk through the rooms of my mind: my memories, imagination, thoughts, and desires. Let us sit down together and chat for a while. I have so much to tell you—and so much I need to hear from you.

You and I both know the company I keep. Help me to leave behind relationships that are unhealthy. Help me to strengthen and heal those that need repair. You called Levi into the community of your disciples. Lord, introduce me to your friends, because in the end, I want always to be found in *your* company.

Contemplatio

“Those who are healthy do not need a physician, but the sick do.”

Sunday of the First Week of Lent — A



Lectio

Matthew 4:1–11

Meditatio

“Jesus was led by the Spirit ...”

We can relate in a very deep way with Jesus as he experiences something so familiar to us: temptation. In this moment of his life, outside of his passion, Jesus is portrayed at his weakest in his human state. Yet, his divinity is clearly manifested as well.

“[C]ommand that these stones become loaves of bread.” We too are tempted to fill the physical hunger and desires we feel with all kinds of material things. Yet a certain hunger often expresses itself as physical need that can only be filled with God’s Word, God’s presence. One does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes forth from the mouth of God.

“If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written: ‘He will command ...’” How often do we put words in God’s mouth? “God will bless you if you ...” “It must be God’s will ...” Or we might bargain with God: “I will give up ... if you do ... for me.” In this way, we test God’s love for us. We actually put limits on God’s love and

dictate to him. We tell him what we want him to do. You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.

“All these I shall give to you, if you will prostrate yourself and worship me.” We often live in a world of “ifs.” If only I won the lottery. . . . If only I had a better job. . . . If only I had become a. . . . We often imagine ourselves in situations other than those we actually live in. What expense we go through trying to make these fantasies a reality. Playing them over and over again in our minds, they may become the object of our worship. The Lord, your God, shall you worship and him alone shall you serve.

Oratio

Be with me in the desert, Spirit of God. Grant me the grace to allow myself to be led by you in the wilderness, where noises cease and nothing can distract me from my own demons. When everything I depend on to sustain me is taken away, may your word be the bread I seek. When I doubt my Father’s love and put it to the test, renew my trust. When I want to escape the trials of my life by seeking a fantasy, help me instead to adore you. Thus may my desert become the place where, in facing my stark humanity, I find communion with you.

Contemplatio

“Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.”