



TABERNACLE BIBLE CHURCH
THE CHURCH WITHOUT WALLS

REMEMBER, REFLECT, RENEW

A Devotional Guide for the Lenten Season

Minister Annie K. Montgomery
Architect & Editor

Foreword & Acknowledgements

Dear Reader,

The aim of this Lenten devotional book is to encourage the saints of God to enter into a season of intentional prayer, fasting, and study of the Word as we walk our way to our Savior's sacrificial death, sobering burial, and glorious resurrection. As I prayerfully considered an architect and author capable of seeking God for the vision and the words to bring this project to life, my heart and mind were led immediately to the most gifted Minister Annie K. Montgomery.

Minister Montgomery has a God-given gift to write words which are both rooted in the Word and inspired by the Spirit of God. I want to personally thank Minister Montgomery for taking on this labor of love and bringing forth such a meaningful devotional work rooted in the Word and full of the Spirit of God.

I would also like to thank those authors who came alongside her in prayer, devotion, and writing to contribute to this work: Sister Lola Hunt; Minister Aaron Garrett; Sister Karen Rogers; Minister Kimberly Collins; and Sister Jacqueline Marks. Each of you have brought forth powerful words from your hearts to the printed page and for that I am truly grateful.

It is my prayer that this season of Lent be one of encouragement and hope as we celebrate the sacrifice made once and for all that we may pass from death to new life in Jesus Christ.

Overjoyed in the resurrection,

Dr. Kneeland C. Brown
Pastor, Tabernacle Bible Church

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Introduction

by Minister Annie Montgomery

Architect & Editor

To begin with, the Lenten season is historical, and it is an incredibly important and symbolic time for Christians. This season is a direct recollection of the days that eventually led up to the death, burial and resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The Lenten Season, also simply referred to as Lent, is a forty-day period that usually begins in February or March (depending on the liturgical year). This year, Lent begins on February 14, 2024, also known as Ash Wednesday, and ends on March 28, 2024, also known as Maundy Thursday.

Ash Wednesday, the day when Lent begins, is a holy day that is observed to remind us that we are all sinners saved by grace and to encourage us to take time to repent for the sins we have committed throughout our lifetime. It is a day when many Christians attend special services where a cross made out of ashes is marked on their forehead, acknowledging that human beings are mortal and that ultimately our bodies will return to the dust from which we were created. Furthermore, it is traditional for many Christians to fast from eating meat on Ash Wednesday and also on all Fridays of Lent. As stated earlier, Lent is forty days, excluding Sundays. This timeframe of forty days has special spiritual significance among Christians because Jesus fasted and prayed for forty days and forty nights in the desert while enduring temptation by Satan before beginning His public ministry. Matthew 4:1-11.

The week before Resurrection/Easter Sunday, which is often referred to as Holy or Passion Week, is also significant among Christians. Holy or Passion Week begins on Palm Sunday, March 24, 2024, which commemorates Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem where He was greeted by palm branches laid at His feet and people waving palm branches and shouting Hosanna! Palm Sunday is a reminder for Christians to always welcome Jesus Christ into our hearts and to constantly make the decision to follow Him. Matthew 21:1-11; Luke 19:10, 31-35.

Holy Wednesday, also known as Ash Wednesday, March 27, 2024, acknowledges the day Judas planned to betray Jesus. Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve Disciples, is known for betraying Jesus by disclosing His whereabouts for thirty pieces of silver. Judas brought men to arrest Jesus and identified Him with a kiss. Jesus was then arrested, tried, and executed. Prayerfully, none of us will find ourselves in a position like Judas. However, we can all learn some things from his behavior. We must always be careful to resist selfish motivations. Matthew 26:47-75; Mark 14:43-72; Luke 22:1-6, 47-71; John 18:1-13.

Holy Thursday, also known as Maundy Thursday, March 28, 2024, commemorates the washing of the disciples' feet by Jesus Christ and the last supper that He shared with them.

The washing of the disciples' feet is a significant event in the Christian tradition, particularly within the context of the Last Supper. This honorable example set by Jesus Christ is embraced by Christians as a perfect demonstration of love, humility, and selfless service to others. Deuteronomy 15:10; Matthew 25:40; Luke 14:11; Philippians 2:3-8; I Peter 5:6.

On March 29, 2024, Holy Friday, also known as Good Friday among Christians, occurs two days before Resurrection/Easter Sunday. It is the time when Christians commemorate the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. It is one of the most significant and solemn days of the Christian faith because it is the day that Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice. For Christians, Good Friday is not only a crucial day of the year, but it is considered to be the most pivotal day in the history for humankind. On Good Friday, Jesus willingly suffered and died after being crucified and executed on a cross on Calvary Hill as the ultimate sacrifice for our sins on Calvary Hill. Isaiah 53:4-5, 7-12; Matthew 27:26-32, 34-35, 45-50, 67-68; Mark 15:21, 23, 32, 34, 36; Luke 23: 11, 26, 33-36, 39-50, 54; John 19:1-3, 13-18, 20, 28-37, 41.

Finally, March 31, 2024 marks the pinnacle and the highlight of the Christian faith. After being beaten, crucified, pierced in the side, and buried for three days, Jesus conquers death and the grave, arising and extending life to all who would believe. This is why Resurrection/Easter Sunday is the holiest of Holy Days for all of Christianity. It honors the Resurrection of Jesus Christ three days after his death by crucifixion, as He had declared. For Christians, Resurrection/Easter Sunday is the grand celebration and joyful conclusion to a Lenten Season of the greatest grief of all grief. It is the fulfilled prophecy of the Messiah who would be persecuted, die for our sins, and rise on the third day, Isaiah 53. Celebrating the Resurrection of Jesus is a way to renew daily hope that we have victory over sin. Because Jesus lives, we have hope. It is only appropriate that after Christians spend time in remembrance and reflection during the forty days of Lent, we are renewed by the event that shook the whole world. Our Lord & Savior, Jesus Christ, conquered the grave and death just as it was prophesied in the Old Testament hundreds of times, thousands of years of years prior to the Resurrection. It's not just a big deal. It's the biggest deal in all of Christianity. It's the realest deal in all of Christian History. Matthew 28:2-7; Mark 15:37-39, 46-47, 16: 5-7; John 11:25-26, 12:23-26

In the following five Lent devotionals, you will find a devotional discussion from five members of our congregation leading us to reflect on: why it is important for us as individuals to observe Lent; why it is important for us as a church family to observe Lent; and a devotional on each of the three commonly known pillars of Lent - prayer, fasting and almsgiving. I encourage all of us to take...to make the time to focus on at least one devotional per week during the forty days of Lent.

Jeremiah 29:13 "And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart."



Notes



Notes

The Three Pillars of Lent

Pillar One: Prayer

by Sister Lola Hunt

What is prayer?

The Bible implies prayer to be the means of communication with God. It is the channel of all of our conversing with God. “do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” Philippians 4:6 ESV This means that all kinds of communication with God fall under the category of prayer - thanksgiving, worship, supplication, praise, intercession, etc. The purpose of prayer is simply to commune with God. It is to have fellowship with God. If our prayer lives ever lose this basic motivation, then it is no longer prayer to the Father.

Prayer is the act of asking God to do what He has already promised to do, which is explained throughout the Bible by the patriarchs, the psalmists, the prophets, the apostles, all the people of God and even Jesus Christ Himself. So, we can conclude without a doubt that prayer is an extremely important part of the Christian life.

Another effective way to grasp the importance of prayer is to look at what prayer is not. There are multiple wrong views about prayer in the world and even among Christians that must be called out and addressed. Consider this partial list:

- ✓ Prayer is not bargaining with God;
- ✓ Prayer is not making demands of God;
- ✓ Prayer is not a way to control God;
- ✓ Prayer is not just about asking God for things;
- ✓ Prayer is not a mere therapeutic exercise nor a meditation-type exercise;
- ✓ Prayer is not something that takes up God’s time nor bothers Him; and
- ✓ Prayer is not a way to impress God or anyone else of one’s super-spirituality.

Again, prayer is simply a means of communicating with God in order to get to know Him and grow closer in our relationship to Him. Not only does prayer affect our lives and the lives of others, but if we focus on the heart of prayer, we’ll find it is an act of pure worship to Him. God’s Word emphasizes the power and purpose of prayer.

What are the Benefits of Prayer?

Despite our doubts, 1 Thessalonians 5:17 tells us to “pray without ceasing”. Why? Because not praying means we won’t be able to develop fully into a mature Christian. In other words, when we don’t take prayer seriously, it means we aren’t serious about our relationship with God. Our spiritual lives, as well as our emotional lives, suffer as a result of that neglect.

When our prayer lives slack off, we often find ourselves unhappy with our faith and with other areas of our lives and relationships. After all, our lives are designed to be centered on Christ, so when we fail to communicate with Him, we will experience a distant and rather empty relationship with God. Additionally, that emptiness will be manifested in various aspects of our lives.

However, as we open our lives to God through prayer, we deepen our relationship and friendship with Him. Bringing our needs before Him, thanking, praising, and worshipping Him gives us a proper view of our relationship with the Lord. He is the mighty God, and we are His creation; yet He has invited us to ask Him into our lives and to be a part of Him. A sense of humility allows us to know God more deeply. When we communicate with Him, our Lord can work on our attitudes. But if we shut Him out, we are unlikely to grow much in our faith or become the people, spiritually speaking, that we should be. To put it in the simplest terms, we benefit from prayer more than God.

When to Pray?

“And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.” Luke 18:1. Man is created with a spiritual instinct. “He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.” Ecclesiastes 3:11. Therefore, prayer often comes naturally. Yet, obstacles come in the way of effective and constant prayer. Jesus knew we would need to be both taught and encouraged to always pray. Jesus did not mean that we should always have our knees bent and eyes closed in prayer, but we must always be in what is sometimes called the spirit of prayer. It's hard to measure how much good such constant prayer does and how much bad constant prayer keeps us from.

How to Pray?

Jesus Christ, our Advocate, made it possible for us to “come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” Hebrew 4:16. Jesus taught his disciples that prayer is more than an event; it is a conversation with God. We are in a relationship with God that involves give and take. The act of sincere prayer emboldens us to see ourselves as God sees us, as sons and daughters, members of his family who are privileged to have regular conversations with our Father. Prayer is a natural outcome of our relationship with God. For example, the natural outcome of David's intimate relationship with God produced Psalm 23.

“Thank you, Lord, that you're my shepherd. And despite all the responsibilities that lay heavily on my shoulders, there is someone right beside me to carry me and care for my concerns. I praise you that you chose my pasture with care, and even if I am not aware of what my real needs are, you will see to it that those needs are met and I will lack nothing that it is good for me to have.

Often, Lord, I find myself confused about what the right path might be, and so I'm grateful that you will lead me to the destination you have planned. When circumstances are dark and hard, Lord, you will never leave me to go through them on my own. And if I'm too tired, too distracted, or even too stubborn to heed your voice, you'll use your shepherd tools, tools of circumstance, other people, and even my mistakes to keep me heading in the right direction. In Jesus' name, Amen."

Who should I Pray for and What should I Pray about During Lent?

Pray for yourself, your family, your church family, your church leaders, all those of the household of faith, locally and globally. For all humankind that where necessary, they may come to know God personally. Pray that God will help you stand in unity with your brothers and sisters around the world who are praying, fasting, and giving. Especially pray for those brothers and sisters who are sick, struggling and suffering.

Pray for guidance in all things that we may please God. Pray that God's Spirit brings peace and joy into our lives. Pray that our sacrifices of this season constantly remind us of our dependence on God. And pray for all humankind to come to know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

Model Prayer

The Bible's best-known prayer is without question the Model Prayer, also known as the Lord's Prayer, which appears in both Matthew and Luke. When the disciples asked Jesus how to pray, Luke 11:1 records this, "Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, Lord teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." So, Jesus taught them how to pray. But it was not so much a prayer to be repeated as it was a template for combining praise and worship, for teaching us to seek God's will in our lives.

Reflection Scriptures: Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-11

Reflection Question:

What unhealthy or unnecessary habits in my life am I willing to change or sacrifice in order to allow more time to communicate with God?

Prayer:

Lord, create in me a clean heart and renew in me a right spirit. Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord my strength and my redeemer. Guide and change me every day to desire and to pursue a closer relationship with you through communication. And Lord please give me Your heart for others that I may freely give and serve as you bless and direct me. In the precious Name of Jesus Christ, I pray. Amen.



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This image shows a full page of a handwriting practice worksheet. It consists of numerous horizontal dashed lines spaced evenly across the page, providing a guide for letter height and placement. The background is plain white, and there are no other markings or text present.

The Three Pillars of Lent

Pillar Two: Fasting

by Minister Aaron Garrett

What is Fasting?

Fasting is setting aside those things we enjoy in this life to focus on seeking the will of God. Fasting draws us closer to God as we purposefully forget about ourselves and concentrate on Him. It is a practice that will heighten the sensibility of our five senses to see God, to hear from God, to feel God's presence in every aspect of our lives, to smell God's anointing fragrance for acceptable worship, and to taste of His goodness! All of this helps us to be open to receive God's direction from God and to worship Him in Spirit and in truth. As a result of our obedience and humility, God's good and perfect will is accomplished in our lives. As we focus on the Lent season, it is interesting and important to understand that although prayer does not require fasting, biblical fasting requires prayer.

The Word of God teaches us that Jesus Christ fasted before He began His ministry on earth. In Matthew 4 we read that Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the desert to fast and pray, only to be tempted by Satan. However, we see during this time of great temptation, Jesus prayed, fasted, and resisted Satan for forty days and nights. Satan was relentless and tempted Jesus in the desert regarding the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. Jesus shows us how to handle these temptations by using the powerful sword of the spirit, which is the Word of God. Even though Jesus hungered and thirst in the physical sense, He was strengthened spiritually, which proved to be effective and essential to His mission to save humanity from the punishment of our sins.

Fasting is seen in both the Old Testament and the New Testament scriptures. We observe in the Old Testament that when Moses went up to Mount Sinai to receive the Covenant from the Lord, he did not eat or drink for forty days and forty nights. He fasted to receive direction from the Lord. In the New Testament, after the ascension of Jesus Christ, the disciples were found worshipping, praying, and fasting by the Holy Spirit who spoke to them regarding the assignments of Barnabas and Saul (also known as Apostle Paul) to do missionary work of spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ.

My brothers and sisters, fasting gives us room to become closer to God who then gives us strength and direction, which leads us into a more intimate relationship with Him and a deeper worship of God. In the life of a believer, Jesus tells us that we who follow Him will suffer in this life for His name's sake. In John 16:33, He states, "In this world, you will have trouble but be of good cheer for I have overcome the world." As believers, we are surrounded by a multitude of outer and inner distractions and struggles. We live in a time where we can easily lose focus on what God has intended for us to do. Often times this is all due to our own selfishness.

During the lent season, the intention of fasting is to identify with Christ's suffering on our behalf, while identifying unhealthy attachments that we have, which are blocking our way to getting closer to God. This means identifying in our lives the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, that we may be entertaining, and bring ourselves back in alignment with God's will for our lives. During this time of fasting, let's listen intently, seek wholeheartedly and search untiringly for His will and direction for our lives. May our obedience through fasting bring glory and honor to His Name and may it increase our worship to Him in Spirit and in Truth.

What Kinds of Fasts Should I Consider?

Each person has their own interests and things each of us enjoy. The decision of what to fast from and how long are personal and between you and God. Here are a few suggestions of what to put aside as we consider fasting during this lent season:

- ✔ Television
- ✔ Red Meats
- ✔ Sporting events
- ✔ Social Media
- ✔ Favorite drinks and snacks
- ✔ In-person shopping or online shopping for personal items such as clothing, shoes and jewelry
- ✔ Unnecessary texting and telephone calls

Other things to consider doing during the fast:

- ✔ Have dinner with family
- ✔ Exercise
- ✔ Read the Word about Lent with family and friends
- ✔ Pray with others
- ✔ Get up earlier to have more personal time with the Lord

These are only a few suggestions. However, remember, the purpose of fasting is to become closer to God and there are unlimited ways to do so. We must seek His will, listen for His direction, and worship Him through our obedience.

How Long Should I Fast?

Lent season is forty days. However, your fast does not have to follow this timeline. Ask in prayer that the Holy Spirit lead you in the timeframe as well. Other suggestions would be a 7 to 20 day fasting period. Fast and pray with a specific plan and strategy because we know that our God also has a plan and strategy for His good and perfect will to be done in our lives.

Reflection Scriptures:

Exodus 34:28; Isaiah 58:3-7; Ezra 8:21-23; Joel 2:12; Matthew 4:2; Matthew 6:16-18; Matthew 6:16-18

Reflection Questions:

1. How often should you fast?
2. Should you tell others that you are fasting? Why or why not?
3. What should you expect to be different after you fast?
4. Do you think fasting is still relevant today? If so, why?
5. How do you understand that fasting brings you closer to God?
6. What other things should I consider fasting from?

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, we honor Your name and thank You for Your grace to us through Jesus Christ and for saving us from our sins. While we fast, we humble ourselves and seek your will to be accomplished in us and through us; we listen for your direction and we worship you. Amen.



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The Three Pillars of Lent

Pillar Three: Almsgiving

by Sister Karen Rogers

What is Almsgiving?

Almsgiving is about giving your time, money, services, or resources to others 'as unto the Lord'. The primacy of almsgiving in Christianity is found in Proverbs 19:17 and is very clear. "If you help the poor, you are lending to the Lord — and He will repay you!" It is viewed as a Christian act, inspired by compassion, and expressed in the desire to seek justice and to pursue the well-being of those who are in need or those who have fallen on hard times. Individuals who are willing to give alms are those who have a heart and the right attitude to give and who have the means and resources to share with their less fortunate neighbors. Almsgiving must be an intentional, sacrificial, unconditional, and caring act — not forced or done begrudgingly.

Why is Almsgiving So Important?

Almsgiving is important and it is stressed in Christianity because it stems from a biblical mandate. The Bible reminds us in Matthew 26:11 that we will "always have the poor among us." There are many reasons why people fall into the category of "poor"— loss of employment, death of a spouse or primary provider, sickness, working for less than a suitable living allowance, natural disaster, unexpected crises, etc. Those of us who are blessed with resources, above what is needed, are in a great position to give (time, money, services, or resources) to those in need. Almsgiving is important and essential for the care and well-being of the poor among us. Throughout the Old Testament, we see clear examples of the need for Almsgiving. It was taught as a directive for providing "justice" and "fairness" to the poor. For example, in Exodus 23:11, the Law prescribed that the land should remain unplowed and unused every 7th year, so that the poor would be able to eat from it, therefore offering a means to satisfy their needs. In the New Testament at 2 Corinthians 8:1-4, we find almsgiving described as an act of love and kindness toward the poor and needy. When we give alms with the right intention — seeking to meet a need and to honor God — we show the true love and genuine kindness of Jesus Christ.

To Whom Should We Give Alms?

This is a profound question that many people ask. Yet, the answer is profoundly simple! My response would be, "Give as the Lord directs you to give!" Each of us has a responsibility and an opportunity to give to others in need. So again, we must remember when we give alms, it should be an intentional, sacrificial, unconditional, and caring act. And we must allow God to lead us to the people with the need that matches our resources. The scripture warns us against misguided motives of giving. Additionally, we have a responsibility and an opportunity to be faithful and generous with our tithes and special offerings to our church; in giving to charitable organizations; and/or in volunteering our time and efforts to help others through our church, as well as charitable organizations. Whatever we're blessed and able to do, 'do it as unto the Lord'.

Is Almsgiving Limited to the Season of Lent?

Almsgiving must never be thought of something that is done exclusively during Lent. As long as there is a need, it is always the right time to give. Jesus explains this in Matthew 26:11, “You will always have the poor among you...” The act of almsgiving is a means to bring us into a closer and deeper relationship with Jesus Christ. Sometimes the “stuff” we have or try to hold on to is merely a distraction from pleasing God. He wants us to love one another and to take care of each other. He has given us two great commandments to emphasize this. At Matthew 22:34-40, “Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” We can show God’s love for our neighbor daily. Remember the rich, young ruler had everything he needed or desired in life, but the one thing that he really needed and asked for was, “What good deed must I do to have eternal life?” Jesus said unto him, “If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.” Matthew 19:16. Unfortunately, the rich young ruler went away sad, because he refused to give up his stuff to follow Jesus and have eternal life. We should not require a special occasion or event for us to give as God has directed us to do.

A Personal Experience with Almsgiving

In my personal experience, I have found a calm re-assurance in giving back to God and in giving to others. It has allowed me to honor God by shifting my focus from me to someone else. “In as much as you’ve done it to the least of these you’ve done it unto me” Matthew 25:40. When I truly understood that almsgiving is a directive from God, I didn’t have to be concerned about “How much should I give?” or “Who should I give to?” or “Does that person ‘deserve’ this?” or “They don’t really look like they need it!” and so on. I realized that when I seek to please God, He honors my obedience. So, to address those issues none of us truly deserve the gifts that God has freely given us. The Word declares at Psalm 24:1 that everything we have already belongs to God.

What is evident in our culture is that mainstream America has done a disservice to us by intentionally idolizing the rich and famous, while neglecting the poor and distressed in our communities. As believers, we must take a stand for justice and the well-being of the poor. Of all the times that Jesus spoke of how we should give to those in need, I find that Matthew 25: 35-36;40 expresses the qualifications for all who will be welcomed into the Kingdom of God. “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me... And the King will answer them, Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”

What are the Benefits of Almsgiving?

One of the greatest benefits that we have when we give is that God is pleased with our obedience, service, and sacrifice. Another benefit we will enjoy is the return for giving, so beautifully described in Luke 6:38, “Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.”

One of the most popular biblical verses that most of us have memorized is John 3:16 which represents the ultimate example of giving to those in need.

- ✓ For God (the Greatest Person)
- ✓ So loved (the Greatest Devotion)
- ✓ The world (the Greatest Number)
- ✓ That He gave (the Greatest Act)
- ✓ His only begotten Son (the Greatest Gift)
- ✓ That whoever believes in Him (the Greatest Condition)
- ✓ Will not perish (the Greatest Mercy)
- ✓ But they will have everlasting life (the Greatest Result)

Reflection Scriptures:

Genesis 1:1; Mark 12:29-31; Psalm 72:2-4, 82:3, 140:12; Proverbs 21:13; Isaiah 9:6; Jeremiah 31:3; Matthew 6:1-4; Mark 12:29-31; John 14:6, John 15:13; Acts 20:35; 2 Corinthians 8:1-4, 9:7-8; James 1:27

Reflection Questions:

1. Describe your experience with almsgiving either as a giver or as a recipient.
2. Describe new ways in which you would like to give, whether through finances or service.
3. Who in might benefit from your almsgiving?

Prayer:

Dear Lord: Teach us your ways and your statutes — to be more loving, kind, giving, and forgiving. Help us to be more like you — to look beyond the outward appearance of others and to see their true need. Remind us that we are nothing without You — as you have blessed us so freely and richly, may we be a blessing to others in need.
In Jesus’ name we pray... Amen!

The Importance of Observing Lent to the Individual Christian Believer

by Minister Kimberly Collins

What is Lent and why is it important to us as Christians? In all honesty, I did not clearly understand the importance and significance of Lent or observing it until I was in my 30's. Like so many other young Christian adults, I initially thought that Lent was simply a tradition that the Catholics observe. It was during the timeframe when I began an in-depth study of God's Word that I learned and understood how important Lent and observing Lent should be to us as individual believers of Jesus Christ. In fact, it is a vital part of who we are in Christ and its significance is foundational to what we believe as Christians.

So, for Christians, it is vital that we do not forget the example and teachings of Jesus Christ - His Birth, His earthly Life, His Death, and His Resurrection. This is why the Word of God instructs and encourages us in Deuteronomy 11:18-20, "You shall therefore lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall teach them to your children, talking of them when you are sitting in your house, and when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers to give them, as long as the heavens are above the earth."

As Christians, it is essential that we understand Lent is about the sacrifice that God made when He gave His only Son, Jesus Christ, to suffer and die in our place and then rise up for our salvation. Lent is about the sacrifice that Jesus Christ made by fasting, praying and resisting Satan in the wilderness for forty days in preparation to be the propitiation for our sins. Lent is about the sacrifice that Jesus Christ made when He suffered an unspeakable death on the cross and then rose from the grave so that we may have eternal life.

As Christians, the sacrifices that we make during Lent, (i.e. giving up certain things) are not worthy to be compared to the sacrifice that Jesus made, and the pain that Jesus endured and overcame. Yet, in doing so, it refreshes and renews us, and makes the resurrection new and fresh in our minds and hearts. When I pray, fast and give during the forty days of Lent, I reflect on who Jesus is and what He taught in order that we might survive here on earth and have eternity with Him. When I pray, fast and give during the forty days of Lent, I reflect on the miracles that He performed to show us the power we have through Him, and I reflect on how he showed love unconditionally to everyone, despite their gender, race, cultural background, color or position in life. I'm humbled when, as a parent, I think about what God must have felt when He saw how His only Son was hated, abused, and then ultimately hung on a cross to die.

As Christians, Lent is critically important to us because it reminds us that as Christ was obedient unto His Father, we should be obedient unto Christ in all we do. I'm reminded, at least annually, during Lent that Jesus Christ, despite my selfish nature, my sin and my disobedience, loved me beyond mere human love and in His infinite wisdom thought that I was worth saving. That is why Lent should be observed by every born-again believer, because Jesus thought we were worthy of being saved.

Reflection Questions:

1. What will be your sacrifice this Lent season and beyond?
2. How will it represent who Jesus Christ is and what He did for you/us?

Reflection Scripture: John 3:16-17

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, as we go through this season of Lent, let us recall in our hearts and minds the ultimate sacrifice that You and Your Son, Jesus Christ, gave that we might be saved and have eternal life with you. Lord, we're also thankful for Your Unconditional Love and the gift of the Holy Spirit that we too can be empowered to love You and one another sacrificially through prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

The Importance of Observing Lent for our Church Family

by Sister Jacqueline Marks

Lent in the Liturgical calendar begins on Ash Wednesday, extends forty days ending on Holy Saturday, the day before the observance of Jesus' resurrection, historically known as Easter Sunday. Many centuries ago, perhaps in remembrance of Jesus' fasting for forty days in the wilderness, the number - forty days became the accepted timeframe of the Lenten season. This year's dates are Wednesday, February 14, 2024, through Saturday, March 30, 2024. The Sundays during the Lenten period are not counted in the forty days.

Philippians 2:5-8 exhorts us to "let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of men. And being found in fashion as a man He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death of the cross." During this season of Lent, we reflect on our Lord's journey of humiliation, His suffering, His crucifixion, and His death. We see a portrait of religious people plotting to kill Jesus and the betrayal by His own disciple, Judas. We visualize the abandonment in the Garden of Gethsemane by the other disciples and hear Peter's denial of knowing the Lord three times. The torture that Jesus endured at the hands of Roman soldiers was brutal; He was beaten severely and scourged; He was mocked and garbed in a scarlet robe; He was crowned with a circlet of spiky thorns; and He was spat on, cursed and forced to carry His own cross through the crowded streets of Jerusalem towards Golgotha. Once there, Jesus was stripped naked and His hands and feet were nailed to the cross, which included a signage stating 'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews', placed over His head. The soldiers gambled for His clothes and to make sure Jesus was dead, they took a sword and pierced Him on the side. He suffered and died for our rescue and deliverance, paying the penalty of our sin. Romans 3:23 states, "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." Romans 6:23 says, "for the wages of sin is death."

Jesus' death included eternal separation from God...leaving us with an account deficit that we could not cover. We were in dire need of a Savior. But God gave his only begotten Son, Jesus, as propitiation for our sins, thus, satisfying His wrath. Jesus humbly submitted and was obedient to the Father's will, even until death. They crucified Jesus, yet He said, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." Luke 23:34

The salvific work of Christ is freely offered to us, yet costly, for it was purchased by the blood of the sacrificial Lamb. Jesus foretold of His own suffering when He said, "If any man shall come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily." Luke 9:22-23. It may not be easy for some to grasp the need for Jesus to have to suffer and sacrifice His life, as it is difficult for some to understand the place of suffering and sacrifice in their own lives.

Sacrificial self-denial is no easy lesson to learn, but it is necessary to prepare and strengthen the individual and thus the Church as a whole. As blood bought believers of Christ, we are empowered to respond like He did.

Lent is a season for all believers to identify with the Passion of Christ and prepare for a new level of spiritual life and growth. His finished work on the cross has laid a solid foundation of faith and practice. In our corporate, public, personal, and private lives, as we draw nearer to God, seeking the mind of Christ, repenting of our sins, praying, fasting, and sharing God's love with His people, in word and deed, He will draw nearer to us. Lent is our 'yes Lord'! Our yes to His will! And our yes to His way!

Thank you, Lord, for showing us the heart of a sacrificial servant...", for the joy that was set before You, You endured the cross, despising the shame and is now seated at the right hand of the throne of God making intercession for us." Hebrews 12:2

Reflection Scriptures:

Romans 15:5-7; Hebrews 10:24-25; Hebrews 12:1-4; Ephesians 4:29, 32; Ephesians 6:18; I Peter 4:8

Reflection Question: What three things can I do as a Christian and as a church member to encourage my Church Family to observe Lent?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I pray that during this Lent season, our Church will unite in observance and grow deeper in our devotion to You and Your passion. I pray in the exalted name of our once crucified and now risen Savior, Jesus Christ! Amen.



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