

Lent with Pope Francis

FIRST WEEK OF LENT ✠ WITH REFLECTIONS BY PAUL CANAVESE

WEDNESDAY
FEBRUARY
26

During Ash Wednesday services, we hear the words “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return” and “Repent, and believe in the Gospel” when ashes are placed on our foreheads. Pope Francis explains that these instructions should remind us that we are limited, imperfect human beings and that we are called to *repentance* and *conversion*. We need to be sorry about what we get wrong and be willing to make a change in our lives. (2/18/15)

What is more difficult for you: recognizing your faults or committing to make a change once you do so? How can you become better at either of these this Lent?

THURSDAY
FEBRUARY
27

Pope Francis points out how easy it is to just stop caring when it seems like there is nothing we can do to make a difference in a world so full of pain, suffering, and injustice. Lent is an especially good time to strengthen our hearts—to be more merciful, open, attentive, and generous—so we can respond in concrete ways. As James urges us, “Make your hearts firm” (James 5:8). (10/4/14)

Are you willing to commit to making your heart stronger this Lent? What is one way you can take a step in this direction today?

FRIDAY
FEBRUARY
28

Living within a fast-paced culture driven by achieving, doing, and “usefulness,” God is usually left out of the equation without us realizing it, according to Pope Francis. Lent urges us to “rouse ourselves” to remember that we are not God and focus on what is most important in our lives. (3/5/14)

How might the drive to be productive distract you from what God wants to tell you?



SATURDAY
FEBRUARY
29

Pope Francis considers the parable of the prodigal son—or as he calls it, the parable of the merciful father—as a perfect one to reflect on during Lent. He notes that both when we might feel “worthless” because of our sin (as the younger son) *and* when we are self-righteous (as the elder son), we need to go to the merciful Father. (3/6/16)

Which son do you identify with right now? Could the merciful Father be seeking you out right now?

Lent with Pope Francis

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT ✠ WITH REFLECTIONS BY PAUL CANAVESE

SUNDAY
MARCH
1

As in the Gospel story of Jesus' Temptation, the desert is a place where the voices of both the God and the tempter can be heard. As we journey through the Lenten "desert" we need to carefully listen for God's voice amidst the noisy and confusing voices that might lead us astray. (2/22/15)

What can you do to quiet the confusing noises and distractions in your life so that you can hear God's voice more clearly this Lent?

MONDAY
MARCH
2

Reflecting on the Lenten season, Pope Francis zeroed in on how Jesus intentionally chose to become poor so that "by his poverty you might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:9). "This is no mere play on words or a catch phrase," he says. It was precisely the humble way that he arrived and lived on earth that allowed him to be close to us, talk to us, heal us, and love us. We are called to imitate Christ and his way. We cannot ultimately save the world through our power and resources, but only by sharing God's wealth through our own poverty. (Lenten Message, 12/26/13)

What would it mean in your life to become poorer so you could love the people around you more as Jesus did?

TUESDAY
MARCH
3

As technology advances, we tend to believe that increases in our power and capabilities equate with progress. But Pope Francis argues that our wisdom and sense of responsibility have not grown as well. We often use technology not because it's the right thing to do, but simply *because we can*. (*On Care for Our Common Home*, 21)

What forms of technology—from electronic devices and online services to driving—might God be calling you to fast from this Lent (even a little bit)?



**WEDNESDAY
MARCH**

4

It is only natural that conflict occurs within our families and friendships, but how we respond to it is even more important. “My advice,” says Pope Francis, “Is never to let the day end without making peace in the family” (cf. Eph. 4:26). He says this can be as simple as a small gesture or caress, not even requiring words. (*The Joy of Love*, 104)

Commit to not letting the sun set on your anger this Lent.

**THURSDAY
MARCH**

5

“Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” Pope Francis calls this line in the Our Father an “equation.” God yearns to forgive us, he explains, but can’t if we keep our hearts closed and keep God’s mercy from entering. It is in forgiving others that we open our hearts so that God can do the same for us. We need to forgive as God does, and God “forgives the maximum.” (3/1/16)

Do you find it difficult to forgive others? Is there someone you need to forgive right now?

**FRIDAY
MARCH**

6

In his encyclical *On Care for Our Common Home*, Pope Francis urges us to take better care of God’s creation. He says that our common home—the earth—is “beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth” because of the many ways people pollute and exploit it. The resulting effect hurts not only nature but also people, especially those who have less. (*On Care for Our Common Home*, 21)

What practices can you commit to this Lent to better care for creation?



**SATURDAY
MARCH**

7

None of us is perfect. We all have let God down in many ways. But “God does not nail us to our sin,” says Pope Francis. Instead of identifying us by how we have failed in life, God calls us by our names. God wants to set each of us free, and wants us to desire that too! Even when it might seem difficult, it is possible with God’s grace. (3/13/16)

Can I fully accept responsibility for the ways I have failed and accept God’s healing grace?

Lent with Pope Francis

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT ✠ WITH REFLECTIONS BY PAUL CANAVESE

**SUNDAY
MARCH
8**

In the Gospel story of the Transfiguration, we hear God identify Jesus as his Son and tell us to listen to him. Pope Francis says that among all the duties of a Christian, the first is to *listen to Jesus*, whose words nourish our souls and faith. In this noisy world, there are so many words and sounds that try to get our attention. But do we take the time to *listen to Jesus* regularly, through prayer or reading Scripture? (3/14/14)

Set aside ten minutes today to intentionally listen to Jesus.

**MONDAY
MARCH
9**

Various kinds of conflict are on the rise, but as Christians we are always called to intervene for reconciliation, understanding, and God's love. Our job is "to heal wounds, to build bridges, to strengthen relationships, and to 'bear one another's burdens' (Gal. 6:2)." We are a communion people who should never forget that we all share a common Father. (*The Joy of the Gospel*, 67)

What opportunities do you see in your life where you can be a bridge-builder?



**TUESDAY
MARCH
10**

Pope Francis calls Lent a "time of combat" against the spirit of evil. While we move through Lent, he says, we need to keep our focus on Easter, when Jesus defeated the power of sin and death once and for all. During Lent, we follow Jesus' path that leads to Resurrection and life. (2/22/15)

Do you ever worry that the spirit of evil is winning in our world? What can you do to keep your focus on Easter during challenging times?

**WEDNESDAY
MARCH
11**

God calls us to love others *patiently* (1 Cor. 13). Pope Francis points out that when we think others should be perfect or that everything should turn out our way, we become impatient and act out in anger. This makes it difficult to be with others and can turn families into “battlegrounds.” Patience requires a “deep compassion” for others that accepts them for who they are, not what they do for us. (*The Joy of Love*, 92)

How can you cultivate patience in your life this Lent?

**THURSDAY
MARCH
12**

The Lenten season is a particularly good time of year to rededicate ourselves to living out the works of mercy and reflecting on God’s mercy for us. Lent is a time to reawaken our conscience, which may have become preoccupied or tired amidst the poverty and need that surrounds us. (Lenten Message, 10/4/15)

Who in my life is most in need of God’s mercy right now? How can I offer it to that person?

**FRIDAY
MARCH
13**

About one-third of all food that is produced is wasted. Pope Francis decries our “culture of waste,” in which we have become used to living with excess and insensitive to what we squander while others go hungry. When food is thrown away, he reasons, it’s like it is being “stolen from the table of the poor.” Not long ago, our grandparents’ generation were careful not to waste even the smallest portions of food. (6/5/13)



Amidst your fasting this Lent, commit to reducing your food waste, by not overbuying and by storing and using leftovers more thoughtfully.

**SATURDAY
MARCH
14**

Jesus invites us to make a “radical about-face” in our lives and “abandon compromises with evil,” says Pope Francis. He says almost all of us act as hypocrites sometimes, and that we may then justify our choices by reasoning that we’re good, church-going people. While Jesus is patient and forgiving with our failings, he also wants more from us. (2/28/16)

Where in your life are you making “compromises” with which Jesus would disagree?

Lent with Pope Francis

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT ✠ WITH REFLECTIONS BY PAUL CANAVESE

SUNDAY
MARCH
15

The story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman centers on the experience of thirst, and not just for water. As humans, we desire many things: truth, love, justice, freedom, and much more. While we can somewhat satisfy our thirst for these desires, deep within us we are hard-wired to seek out “something more.” That deeper thirst can only be slaked by God through Jesus. (1/25/15)

Pray to God today for living water that will satisfy your deepest thirst.

MONDAY
MARCH
16

Pope Francis laments the state of many neighborhoods, which have become places of individualism, isolation, defensiveness, and mistrust. “Jesus desires to pour out an abundance of life upon our cities,” he says. Our neighborhoods should connect residents to each other and help us support each other, especially those in need. This is the Gospel way. (*The Joy of the Gospel*, 75)

What can you do this week to foster more connection and community in your neighborhood?



TUESDAY
MARCH
17

The first step in living a Gospel-based life, states Pope Francis, is learning to blame ourselves. We’re very good at blaming other people and playing innocent, but for us to become better people we need to become aware of what we do wrong and what we are capable of doing wrong. The next step is to ask God for mercy and forgiveness. (3/2/15)

This Lent, pray for the grace to learn how to “blame yourself” and recognize the ways in which you sin or are capable of sinning.

**WEDNESDAY
MARCH
18**

Pope Francis says it's important for us to be loving in the way we treat family members who aren't as committed to or knowledgeable about our faith. He is concerned that sometimes "supposedly mature believers" are "unbearably arrogant" to others in their family. The love of Christ, on the other hand, is based in humility, concern, and understanding. That kind of love attracts people to the Church. (*The Joy of Love*, 98)

How do you relate to those, especially in your extended family, who may be on the margins of the Church?

**THURSDAY
MARCH
19**

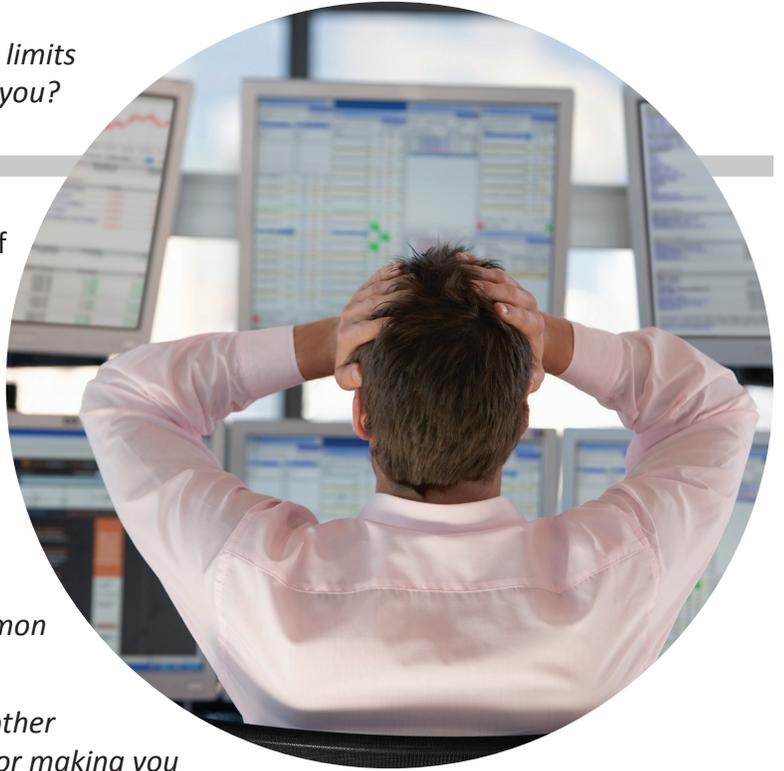
Are you a "Yes, but..." Christian? Pope Francis says there is a tendency for some "lukewarm" Christians to insist on wanting things their way instead of God's way. They're willing to accept salvation, but only on their own conditions. They'll admit God has graced them, but always have something to complain about. But relationship with God is a package deal. (3/24/15)

In what ways do you try to put limits on God and how God can love you?

**FRIDAY
MARCH
20**

The overwhelming influence of digital media has resulted in a noisy cacophony of information overload and confusing "mental pollution." Wise decision-making requires thoughtful reflection, self-examination, open dialogue, and an honest, generous desire to understand others. (*On Care for Our Common Home*, 47)

Is your use of social media or other online media overloading you or making you confused? What healthy limits can you put in place?



**SATURDAY
MARCH
21**

Halfway through the season of Lent, Pope Francis asks us to assess whether we are on the path of life or "the path of lies." "How many locks do I still have on my heart?" Where do we find our joy: in generously reaching out to help others or in staying wrapped up in ourselves? (2/25/16)

What is your own assessment of your progress on your Lenten journey? Do you need to recalibrate?

Lent with Pope Francis

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT ✠ WITH REFLECTIONS BY PAUL CANAVESE

SUNDAY
MARCH
22

The Gospel of the man born blind tells the story of one person who takes a road from blindness to light, and others who take a road to greater blindness. The Pharisees were so convinced that they already had the light in their possession, and did everything possible to close their hearts and deny the light of Christ. (3/30/14)

Is your heart fully open to Christ's light? Where might Christ be showing up in your life, perhaps unexpectedly?

MONDAY
MARCH
23

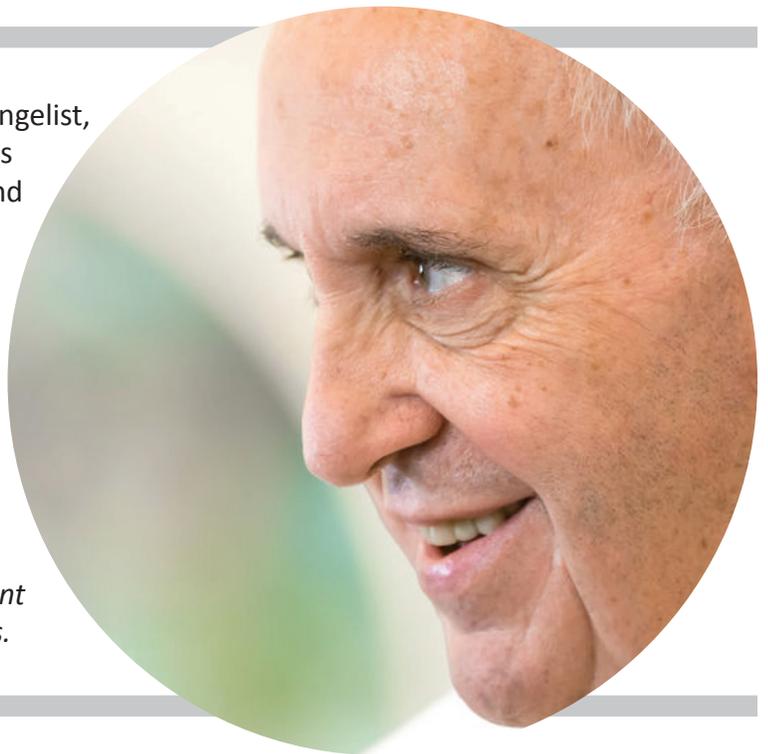
In reflecting on the sinfulness and corruption that overtook King David, Pope Francis stressed that when we are most secure, powerful, comfortable, and/or successful, we can be the most vulnerable to falling away from God and ultimately to "corruption." It is in these times that we need to remain humble and remember our dependence on God. (1/29/16)

Do you need God in your life, or do you think you can go it alone? How might you take a step toward humility and recognizing your dependence on God?

TUESDAY
MARCH
24

Pope Francis is the ultimate evangelist, wanting to share the Good News with everyone he encounters and "stir up enthusiasm" for all Christians to do the same with "fervor, joy, generosity, courage, boundless love, and attraction!" This excitement comes from the Holy Spirit when it burns in our hearts. (*The Joy of the Gospel*, 261)

Challenge yourself to be a little (or a lot) less tentative or hesitant in sharing your faith with others.



**WEDNESDAY
MARCH
25**

The Gospel is not just about our individual relationship with God or a bunch of small actions of service we perform over time. It is really about the kingdom of God: transforming the society we live in to be as God intends. It is about “every aspect of human life” and all of us should participate. (*The Joy of the Gospel*, 180)

How are you called by God to truly influence the society you live in and the larger world?

**THURSDAY
MARCH
26**

Jesus challenges us to always look below the surface, especially when looking at people. We should focus on a person’s heart, as God does. God’s mercy is offered to everyone, and the Church—God’s house—is a place where everyone is welcome, doors wide open. Our sins will never push God away, but only make him seek us out more urgently. Don’t forget: “God forgives all, and God forgives always.” (3/13/15)

How can you open your own doors wider to those who are in need of mercy in your life?

**FRIDAY
MARCH
27**

The dynamics of interpersonal conversations have been changing with the rise of electronic communication and social media. Technology now allows us to terminate relationships “on a whim” and distance ourselves from the messy emotions and reality of “real relationships.” As Christians, we should be concerned about how we connect with others in deep and meaningful ways. (*On Care for Our Common Home*, 47)

Is there a relationship in your life in need of a phone call, written note (on paper!), or in-person conversation?



**SATURDAY
MARCH
28**

The tradition of Sabbath—obeying God’s command to regularly rest, practice gratitude, and reconcile our relationships with God and others—is now a very counter-cultural action. In our achievement-based culture, we can feel irresponsible taking a break (Americans wasted 658 million paid vacation days in 2015). But, Pope Francis teaches, “Rest opens our eyes to a larger picture and gives us renewed sensitivity to the rights of others.” (*On Care for Our Common Home*, 237)

On this weekend as we enter Holy Week, take a full Sabbath break. How can you ensure that you build more Sabbath into your life?

Lent with Pope Francis

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT ✠ WITH REFLECTIONS BY PAUL CANAVESE

SUNDAY
MARCH
29

Even in the midst of Lent, we don't forget about Resurrection, such as the story of Jesus' raising of Lazarus. Pope Francis points out that we all have some parts of our heart that are "a little dead," and we can become attached to these tombs of sin and trapped in them. They can even make us "smell bad" like a corpse! But Jesus has the power to roll away the stone and raise us. (4/6/14)

What part of your heart is dead or trapped in sin? Are you willing to let Jesus roll away the stone?

MONDAY
MARCH
30

Pope Francis has never been shy about his desire for us all to embrace the poor. He teaches that working to liberate, promote, and fully integrate the poor in society is the work of *all* individual Christians and Christian organizations. This means much more than "a few sporadic acts of generosity," but also addressing structural causes of poverty and ensuring the dignity of all. (*The Joy of the Gospel*, 187-188)

What can you do to prioritize the poor in your life?

TUESDAY
MARCH
31

Almsgiving, Pope Francis explains, is based on a Greek word for "mercy." So when we follow this Lenten practice of giving to those in need, we must do it with a spirit of mercy and inner joy. He also warns us about judging those who are in need, and restricting our giving because we think the poor will make bad decisions. "And you, what do you do in secret, that no one sees?" Those who are not poor make bad decisions, too. (4/9/16)

What keeps you from giving more to the poor? Do you find yourself judging those who are in need?



WEDNESDAY
A P R I L
1

Pope Francis often speaks about the importance of “gazing” at others with love, as Jesus did. He’s referring to being fully present to another person and recognizing who they are below the surface. This is even more important living in a culture of distraction, when everyone seems to be looking at a screen all the time. “Much hurt and many problems result when we stop looking at each other.” (*The Joy of Love*, 128)

Be attentive about looking into others’ eyes, especially those closest to you.

THURSDAY
A P R I L
2

In reflecting on the gospel story of Judas selling Jesus for thirty silver pieces, Pope Francis explained how Judas treated Jesus as a commodity. But Jesus continues to be sold today, Pope Francis argues. “When we opt for thirty pieces of silver, we set Jesus aside.” He used as an example how we may turn others into commodities when we hurt them through harmful gossip. When we do this, we’re doing the same thing Judas did. (3/27/13)

What motivates you to speak poorly about another person? How can you stop yourself the next time you are tempted to do so?

FRIDAY
A P R I L
3

God’s directive that we “till and keep” the world (Gen. 2:15) means that each community can claim what we need to survive, but we also must preserve, protect, and care for creation so it will still be there for future generations. The earth belongs to God, not us. (*On Care for Our Common Home*, 67)

What can you do this weekend to reduce the number of resources you are stealing from coming generations?



SATURDAY
A P R I L
4

Pope Francis points out the necessity of Christians being consistent: across how they think, feel, and act as a Christian. We are meant to bear witness to Jesus in all of these ways, but if any of them is missing, something is very wrong. Christians should not say one thing, but do another! The witness of living a consistent Christian life is much more likely to convert an atheist than reading theological proofs all day long. (2/27/14)

Pray to God for the grace to be consistent, for you as an individual, your parish, and the whole Church.

Lent with Pope Francis

HOLY WEEK ✠ WITH REFLECTIONS BY PAUL CANAVESE

SUNDAY
APRIL
5

In one Palm Sunday homily, after hearing the full passion narrative, Pope Francis invited us to ask a simple question: Who am I in this story? Am I an enthusiastic person praising God with palms or someone who stands back? Am I like Pilate, waffling in a difficult situation? Like Simon, helping to carry a cross? Like the brave women who stood by? (4/13/14)

Which of the people in this story are you like? Which do you want to become more like?

MONDAY
APRIL
6

The cross Jesus carried was heavy, because it contained the weight of all of the sins and injustices ever committed. While it holds “all the ugliness of evil”—human beings at their worst—there is another side to the cross. It is also about the immense, merciful love of God, all the greater because of how deeply we can fail. (4/18/2014)

What crosses you are carrying in your life right now?



TUESDAY
APRIL
7

Through his life, including his Passion, Jesus walked a path of non-violence. He taught us to turn the other cheek, love our enemies, drop our stones, and put away our swords. He showed us that violence is not the answer and how acts of active nonviolence can be powerful and transformative. Nonviolence must start in the family and spill out into the world through society and the way nations interact. (1/1/17)

What can you do to take steps forward on Jesus' nonviolent path?

WEDNESDAY
APRIL
8

Christians cannot help but be hopeful. We know that people can change and rise to their true potential. Even though everything may not happen as it should in this life, we know Love will have the final word. “God may well make crooked lines straight,” says Pope Francis, “And draw some good from the evil we endure in this world.” Even during Lent, we know the Resurrection is coming. (*The Joy of Love*, 116)

Where in your life do you need an injection of hope?

THURSDAY
A P R I L
9

HOLY THURSDAY • Before washing the feet of twelve inmates at a Holy Thursday service in a prison in Rome, Pope Francis reminded everyone of the significance of the act. While the action of washing feet was normal at Jesus' time, it was a service performed by slaves. Driven by his great love for us, he "became a slave to serve us, to heal us, to cleanse us." (4/2/15)

What is a form of serving others that feels "beneath you" but that God may be calling you to perform?

F R I D A Y
A P R I L
10

GOOD FRIDAY • In the Joy of Love, Pope Francis quote Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to explain how *love endures all things* (1 Cor. 13). "The person who hates you most has some good in him," writes Dr. King. He goes on to explain that once you can recognize the image of God in each person, you can't help from loving that person no matter what they do. "The strong person is the person who can cut off the chain of hate, the chain of evil." Father, forgive them, they know not what they do. (*The Joy of Love*, 118)

How can you help break the "chain of hate"?



SATURDAY
A P R I L
11

HOLY SATURDAY • As Christians, like the women disciples, we are to *enter the tomb*. This is much more than an intellectual act. It requires entering into the Mystery of God, pushing beyond our comfort zones, inhibitions, fears, and whatever else holds us back. We need to open ourselves to wonder, contemplation, and the humility "not to take ourselves so seriously." Life is straight ahead. (4/4/15)

Where is Easter leading you this year? What do you need to set aside in order to enter the Mystery?

SUNDAY
A P R I L
12

EASTER SUNDAY • Christ is risen! The Easter message is "to *awaken and resurrect hope* in hearts burdened by sadness, in those who struggle to find meaning in life." We must proclaim this as joyful servants—by the ways we live and love others—to a world so in need of hope. (3/26/16)

How can you embody hope by the way you live your life this Easter season?