



*2018*

# LENT





# LENT

# INTRODUCTION

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*Peet Dickinson+*

## On Algorithms & Identities

*“And the tempter came and said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God...’ - Matthew 4:3*

Where did Satan start when tempting Jesus in the wilderness? He started by calling his identity as the Son of God into question. The tempter hasn't stopped trying the very same tactic with every man, woman, and child to this day, planting that poisonous question, “Who are you really?” And he's always ready with his forked tongue to supply deviant answers with all kinds of corrupting devices at his disposal.

In our day, I think Satan's most potent deception device is what I'd call the “affinity algorithm.” It's that program the marketers use to aggregate all the Google searches we do, YouTube videos we watch, Amazon purchases we make, news stories we click, and Netflix shows we stream. Then they funnel us into our own little affinity echo chambers to find perceived comfort of virtual “like minded” enclaves. In those places the Devil takes good things and makes them ultimate things. He coaxes our hearts to love, wills to choose, and minds to justify alternative identities separate from the one true identity we have in Christ Jesus as adopted sons and daughters of God. That, in turn, produces a myriad of sinful behaviors and broken relationships with our fellow man, and saddest of all, a break in our relationship with our Heavenly Father.

So, Sisters and Brothers, recognizing your brokenness, I invite you to the observance of a holy Lent, and with the help of this devotional tool, to meditate once again on the Good News in Christ Jesus and be led by the Spirit of God to break free from Satan's affinity algorithm and know your true identity. Let us cast off those false identities that cling to us and to which we cling. Let us remember that great truth about our identity written by Saint Paul, “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons (and daughters) of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons (and daughters), by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”

# On Lent

Lent is a season of repentance. Beginning on Ash Wednesday and ending on Easter Sunday, it is a time to prepare our hearts for the foundational events of the Christian faith- the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the early church, Lent was a time for new converts to prepare for baptism by learning the beliefs and practices of their new community. This included a special emphasis on fasting, prayer, confession, and alms giving. For Christians today, it is a time to deny self, take up our cross, and follow Christ in every area of our life. Through taking up the season and practice of Lent we seek to be renewed in our identity in Christ that we received at baptism.

# On Lenten Practice

During this season, prepare your heart for Easter by setting aside sin and fixing your eyes on Jesus. Consider using these forty days as a time to fast from social media, certain foods, or anything that the Holy Spirit might bring to mind. Use your time in prayer or Scripture study and consider giving money to the poor. Remember that these disciplines are not done to earn God's favor, but rather, they are intended to remind you of your need for Christ and conform you more fully into his image by the power of the Holy Spirit. In anticipation of Easter, every Sunday during Lent is a reminder of resurrection. So Sundays during Lent, you are invited to cease fasting and enjoy God's goodness. Let these days remind you that even in death, there are glimmers of life.

40 days

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# ASH WEDNESDAY

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*Jacob Graudin*

## On Rending & Return

There is a unique sensation in the vocabulary of human feeling that I grew quite familiar with in college: the sense that time is almost up. It usually struck around 4am, when I was in a near-vacant library frantically writing a term paper I had put off till the last possible minute. It was here that my basest fight-or-flight instincts would kick in, I would buckle down, and within the next four hours I would compose an improbable amount of apparently cohesive thought. While I generally pulled through, grade-wise, the sweaty realization that time was almost up was never worth barely making it.

It's this same sensation with which the Israelites are confronted in today's reading from Joel 2, wherein the eponymous prophet thunders, "Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming; it is near." The connotation is clear: time's up, the LORD is coming to set things right, and that is not good news for the recalcitrant people of Israel. In this moment, I can imagine that the fight-or-flight instincts, religiously focused, might manifest themselves among God's people. That is, the Israelites will likely either dive even deeper into their rebellion against God, or they might grovel in the dirt, presenting sacrifices to appease their wrathful Lord.

The Lord, however, will take neither response. Both come from the sinful, self-justifying heart. Both of them are endemic patterns that define human societies. Neither possess much interest in a restored relationship with the Creator of all. Instead, the Lord presents, through his prophet, a third option: return. Not a fight against his holiness, or a flight from his judgment, but a return to his very self and the steadfast love he possesses for his people. This return is described as an affair of the heart, that is, the very core of one's being, and involves a visceral rending, a splitting open and pouring out all guilt, all shame, and all remorse before his mercy. It's not very pretty. It's certainly not polite.

What I find so interesting about this is that, as a Christian, time is no longer "almost up" for me, or for anyone who confesses the name of Jesus. I have, through the biblical narrative and witness of the Church, seen the cataclysmic "day of the Lord" arrive in the cross of Jesus. And yet, despite this, my natural temptation is still to pursue "fight-or-flight" when confronted with the reality of my sin. The same pattern of performance that drove my 4am fever dream compositions also drives me to fly from my Creator God, to burrow more deeply into my shame.

But.

*"Return to the LORD your God,  
for he is gracious and merciful,  
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love."*

The Christian life, shaped by the reality of the cross, is one of return. This means that we are not defined by our sin, nor by our vain attempts to expiate that sin, but by returning to the LORD every day, every hour, and every moment. His steadfast love, by definition, will never abandon us. This Lent, I invite you to daily “rend your heart” and spend time before the LORD, confessing your sin, pouring out your fears and anxieties, and finding your refuge in his love. This might look like time spent talking to God in the car, before bed, while folding laundry, or while making coffee. Whenever it is, make it consistent, and let it be honest. If you forget or forgo for a few days, pick it back up. I intend to spend a few minutes every day rending my heart in a prayer journal, and in so doing return to his steadfast love.

Won't you return with me?

## Collect

*Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing you have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

## Readings

### *Wednesday*

JOEL 2:1-2, 12-17  
PSALM 103  
2 COR 5:20-6:10  
MATT 6:1-6, 16-21

### *Thursday*

PSALM 7:1-18  
37:19-42  
HAB 3:1-18  
PHIL 3:12-21  
JOHN 17:1-8

### *Friday*

PSALMS 95, 31, 35  
EZEK 18:1-4, 25-32  
PHIL 4:1-9  
JOHN 17:9-19

### *Saturday*

PSALMS 30, 32, 42, 43  
EZEK 39:21-29  
PHIL 4:10-20  
JOHN 17:20-26

# ASH

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## WEEK ONE

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*Lisa Rohrer*

# On Promise & the Word

“Pick you up at 8:00!”

“I promise I’ll bring it when I see you.”

“Yes, let’s get coffee this week.”

“I’ll call you later tonight.”

These are just a few of the promises I made in the last week. Do they sound familiar? Maybe you’ve been the recipient of these kinds of promises from your friends or family members, or maybe you’ve made such promises yourself. If you’re like me, these kinds of phrases tumble out of your mouth with ease, delight, grand intentions, and—unfortunately—often zero follow through.

The Bible tells the story of someone else who makes a lot of promises, but unlike us, this someone has proven that he follows through. The God of the Bible—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is a God on whose promises we can rely because this is a God who established his promise, foreshadowed the fulfillment of his promise, and fulfilled his promise. As we enter into the Lenten season, might we help one another to cultivate the practice of remembering God’s promises. How? By reading God’s Word.

After Noah built the ark, he went into it and, while the earth and all its inhabitants were washed away, or cleansed, by the flood, God protected Noah and his family, just as he said he would (Gen. 7). When the flood subsided and Noah made an altar to God on the dry land, God reinstated his commandment to Adam and Eve (be fruitful and multiply) and established a covenant with Noah: “Never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth” (Gen. 9).

By the time we get to the New Testament, we’ve read about a lot of Adam-types who fail to keep up their promises and a God who, in his just nature, ought to destroy the earth again. And then we learn about Jesus—the image of the invisible God, sent from the Father for a specific mission. At the beginning of his adult life, he arrives at the Jordan to be baptized by his cousin, John. The beloved Son—both God and man—humbles himself so far as to suggest he needs washing, though he is perfectly clean (Mark 1). This baptism, reminiscent of the cleansing flood of the earth, foreshadows God’s remarkable plan for how he will keep his covenant: by Jesus claiming impurity, so that we can be made pure.

It’s by reading the Word of God that we remember that God not only establishes his promises and foreshadows their completion, but also displays their fulfillment. We’re reminded that Christ Jesus “suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God,” (1 Peter 3). Christ’s death on the cross fulfills God’s promise because Jesus is the perfect sacrifice for our failure to keep our promises. We learn that baptism—as displayed through the flood waters in Noah’s time, humbly participated in by the King of Kings, and

re-enacted in the church today is an “appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” rather than a declaration of our own promises being fulfilled by our own efforts.

As you consider the season of Lent, consider the practice of reading God’s Word. This practice will not establish your own salvation, but remind you of how God established it for us, granting us identities grounded in the cross of Christ. This practice will not prove how good we are at remembering to read the Bible, but will teach us that Christ remembers us. This practice will not prove to God that we can fulfill our promises, but show us that it was God who fulfilled his promise of salvation by becoming a man, suffering on the cross, and being raised to new life. It is my prayer that by reading of such a glorious promise-keeper that I too will be molded into his likeness.

# Collect

*Almighty God, whose blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan: Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations; and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.*

# Readings

## *Sunday*

PS 63:1-11, 98, 103  
DANIEL 9:3-10  
HEB 2:10-18  
JOHN 12:44-50

## *Monday*

PSALMS 41, 52, 44  
GEN 37:1-11  
1 COR 1:1-19  
MARK 1:1-13

## *Tuesday*

PSALMS 45, 47, 48  
GEN 37:12-24  
1 COR 1:20-31  
MARK 1:14-28

## *Wednesday*

PSALMS 119:49-72, 49  
GEN 37:25-36  
1 COR 2:1-13  
MARK 1:29-45

## *Thursday*

PSALMS 50, 59, 60  
GEN 39:1-23  
1 COR 2:14--3:15  
MARK 2:1-12

## *Friday*

PSALMS 95, 40, 54, 51  
GEN 40:1-23  
1 COR 3:16-23  
MARK 2:13-22

## *Saturday*

PS 55, 138, 139:1-23  
GEN 41:1-13  
1 COR 4:1-7  
MARK 2:23--3:6

01

## WEEK TWO

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*Bryan Hunter*

# On Sacrifice & Surrender

My mother once tutored a precocious six year old girl. Just before Lent, Mother asked her,

“What are you giving up for Lent?”

“Broccoli,” the girl replied.

“Why broccoli?” Mother asked.

“Because I hate it,” she explained.

“You’re supposed to sacrifice something you like,” Mother instructed her. “What’s something you like?”

“Chocolate, but I’m not about to give that up,” the girl emphatically replied.

Mother was a good tutor, but, in this instance, a poor theologian. How often have we contemplated giving up biscuits, or barbecue (me), or coffee (me again – in the same year, which did not draw me closer to God), or bourbon? Such a response to Lent often comes from a visceral notion that the season is somehow prescriptive – the medicine going down without a spoonful of sugar.

Such an approach arises from a stubborn notion -- horribly antithetical to the Truth of the Gospel -- that we’re supposed to weed out certain guilty (or sometimes perfectly innocent) behavior for 40 days to curry God’s favor.

Is that what Lent is really about? Do we get a mulligan for the remaining 325 days?

Psalm 16, our psalm for week two of Lent, is described as a *miktam* of David. Some scholars believe it is a Babylonian word for vessel, perhaps applied to a musical instrument, which, if true, would likely have made its way into the Hebrew lexicon during the Babylonian captivity. As a poetic device, the captivity serves as a historical event that serves as a metaphor for David’s (and Israel’s) current sins that separate them from the love of God. Captivity always followed on the heels of Israel’s insistence that their plan made more sense than God’s. Following the nation’s own path never ended well. It resulted in slavery.

In Psalm 16, David contrasts God’s “holy people” with those who “run after other gods,” then David rejoices in the truth that God’s law, rather than crushing him under its weight, provides true freedom – life. David describes it thus (v. 6): “The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places.” True freedom lies in resigning ourselves to God’s sovereignty.

In his book *Fear and Trembling*, the Danish existential philosopher Soren Kierkegaard explores the wrenching tale of Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac, our Old Testament lesson for the second week of Lent found in Genesis 22. Kierkegaard wrestles with the seemingly Hobson’s choice Abraham faces: obey God and slaughter Isaac, or disobey God by sparing his son. Against the background of this conundrum is the promise God made to Abraham to create

a great nation out of Isaac's descendants – an obvious impossibility given the demand God has made of the childless youth.

Kierkegaard makes a brilliant observation about Abraham's decision to obey God. He says that Abraham is willing to sacrifice Isaac without abandoning God's promise to bring the nation of Israel out of Isaac – a seemingly absurd position. But Kierkegaard asserts that Abraham is able to rest in that promise through his resignation in the "strength of the absurd." Kierkegaard explains this seeming paradox by pointing out that everyone fundamentally seeks happiness in one of two places: people of hope, like Abraham, seek happiness outside themselves (i.e., in God), where others seek happiness within themselves, but are always disappointed and fearful because they are aware of their fallibility. Kierkegaard observes Abraham's hope in the strength of the absurd, and he designates it as faith. This faith is the grace to leave the seemingly impossible details in God's hands.

In the eighth chapter of St. Mark's gospel, Jesus predicts his death to his disciples. Peter calls Jesus aside and rebukes him for his shocking word. Jesus' response to Peter: "You are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man." In other words, Peter is placing his idea for happiness within himself by relying on his own vision of the Messiah and his work rather than resigning himself to God's plan, even if that means Jesus on a Roman cross, and having faith that it will work out for his – and all of creation's – good.

So this Lent, rather than making a broccoli or chocolate decision, those two wonderful things of man, I challenge myself and you: instead of giving something up, just ... give up. Like Abraham, let's resign our wills to God's sovereignty, putting our identities in the finished work of the cross of Jesus. Instead of trying futilely to negotiate with God on our own terms, let's approach Lent with our appointed epistle lesson in mind. In chapter 8, beginning with verse 31, the writer of Romans reminds us God is for us. Everything he's done, is doing and will do is for us and our good. He's so much for us that he was not willing even to spare his own son, rather he graciously gave him up to give us all things. Relying on this promise, "nothing shall separate us from the love of Christ, not death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation" (v. 38 & 39).

That's something worth giving up for.

## Collect

*O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy: Be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways, and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of your Word, Jesus Christ your Son; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

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# Readings

## *Sunday*

PS 24, 29, 8, 84  
GEN 41:14-45  
ROM 6:3-14  
JOHN 5:19-24

## *Monday*

PSALMS 56, 57-58,  
64-65 | GEN 41:46-57  
1 COR 4:8-21  
MARK 3:7-19A

## *Tuesday*

PSALMS 61, 62, 68:1-36  
GEN 42:1-17  
1 COR 5:1-8  
MARK 3:19B-35

## *Wednesday*

PSALMS 72, 119:73-96  
GEN 42:18-28  
1 COR 5:9--6:8  
MARK 4:1-20

## *Thursday*

PSALMS 70, 71, 74  
GEN 42:29-38  
1 COR 6:12-20  
MARK 4:21-34

## *Friday*

PSALMS 95, 69, 73  
GEN 43:1-15  
1 COR 7:1-9  
MARK 4:35-41

## *Saturday*

PSALMS 75, 76, 23, 27  
GEN 43:16-34  
1 COR 7:10-24  
MARK 5:1-20

*“The gospel is not a doctrine of the tongue, but of life. It cannot be grasped by reason and memory only, but it is fully understood when it possesses the whole soul and penetrates to the inner recesses of the heart.”*

*John Calvin*

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## WEEK THREE

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*Hannah VanSyckel*

# On Failure & Forgiveness

In the reading from Exodus, we find Moses giving the 10 Commandments to the people of Israel; these laws are the foundation of the Mosaic Law, and we know there are hundreds of laws that follow. The Israelites are afraid to hear from God directly, but Moses tells them “Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin” (v. 20). Does God think that any of the Jews, his chosen children, will pass this test, having kept these commandments perfectly? Of course not. A test one will inevitably fail seems an awful burden to bear.

Paul, in our reading from Romans, poignantly explores the tension of yearning to obey the law of God but feeling powerless to do so. Who among us cannot relate to Paul’s words, admitting “For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing” (v. 18b-19). There is an internal battle in all Christians, having been made new by the blood of Jesus but still waging war against the sin that dwells within us as created beings.

In this time of Lent, we are meant to face the reality of our sinfulness. The Holy Spirit brings true conviction of sin; the Spirit shows us our need for Christ’s forgiveness and areas where we are rejecting God’s Law, so that we may experience full life. The psalmist writes “The Law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; [...] the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever [...]” (v. 7-9).

However, I know I often become overwhelmed by the ugliness of my sin and feel captive by the ways I yield to darkness. Paul’s cry rings true for me-- “Wretched [woman] that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (v. 24). I am discouraged by the accusations whispered into my heart that I am unworthy of God’s love, that I am too messy for Christ’s sacrifice to apply to me, that I should simply decide to be good or healthy or organized or pure, but instead my weakness is my shame.

But my weakness is my boast. As my body falters and as my inadequacies rise, I am able to look to the cross. There on the tree, Jesus, a perfect man, God himself, said “My power is made perfect in your weakness.” His power, the power to redeem the enslaved, is demonstrated because I am powerless to face the Accuser on my own. My answer to the haunting words of condemnation must be, and can only be, “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (v. 25). Jesus experienced brokenness, sickness, temptation, and death, not so that I wouldn’t have to, but so that when I do, I can rest in the confidence that he conquered

all of those things because he knew I never could. Jesus saved me, not because 'I could save myself if I just got it together' but because I will always be too messy, too disorganized, too impure, and too weak. I will always need his help, and because Christ loves me, he offered it eternally. The cross reminds me that Jesus Christ knows exactly what it takes to redeem me, and he did it anyway.

# Collect

*Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

# Readings

## *Sunday*

PS 93, 94, 34  
GEN 44:1-17  
ROM 8:1-10  
JOHN 5:25-29

## *Monday*

PSALMS 80, 77  
GEN 44:18-34  
1 COR 7:25-31  
MARK 5:21-43

## *Tuesday*

PSALMS 78:1-72  
GEN 45:1-15  
1 COR 7:32-40  
MARK 6:1-13

## *Wednesday*

PSALMS 119:97-120, 81,  
82 | GEN 45:16-28  
1 COR 8:1-13  
MARK 6:13-29

## *Thursday*

PSALMS 42, 43, 85, 86  
GEN 46:1-7, 28-34  
1 COR 9:1-15  
MARK 6:30-46

## *Friday*

PSALMS 95, 88, 91, 92  
GEN 47:1-26  
1 COR 9:16-27  
MARK 6:47-56

## *Saturday*

PSALMS 87, 90, 136  
GEN 47:27--48:7  
1 COR 10:1-13  
MARK 7:1-23

# 03

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## WEEK FOUR

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*Matt Lambert*

# On Swine & Saints

The French novelist Leon Bloy was born in the 1840s to an abusive, authoritarian Roman Catholic family. Bloy, naturally rebellious, became a staunch agnostic and stayed so during his early adult life. But Bloy was eventually befriended by a kindly neighbor who was both devoutly Catholic and a moderately successful writer. As a mentor, this neighbor led Bloy into writing and brought him back to the faith.

Like his parents, Bloy's writing is heavy-handed, condescending, and in French. So he is not recommended outside of very nerdy (and very Roman Catholic) literati circles. But he is quotable. The austerity of his own daily life produced bubble-bursting, challenging observations. Bloy once wrote that "Any Christian who is not a hero is a pig," a charge leveled at those Christians who isolated themselves from the atrocities of WWI, while others unflinchingly left the trenches to walk onto battlefields in order to care for the wounded on both sides.

"There is only one tragedy in the end: Not to have been a saint."

This one may as well have been leveled at himself, as the end of his life was not entirely saintly. Friends considered his obsession with sainthood to be idolatrous, his writing grew so caustic and accusatory that he lost any readership, and he became completely dependent on charity that he was nicknamed "the ungrateful beggar" (apparently after one of his own novels).

While Bloy's quest to be a hero or saint is understandable, even admirable, one wonders if he knew anything of the joy of Paul and the apostles. Paul's beautiful exhortation in Ephesians 2:4-10 is so packed with joy that he can't help but be a saint in response. It reads like a laundry list of God's own heroic generosity:

God is merciful to us!  
God loves us with a great love!  
You were dead but made alive!  
We have been saved by grace!  
You are seated in Heaven!  
You have God's immeasurable grace and kindness!  
Did I mention you have been saved—despite yourself—from yourself—no thanks to you?

In verse 10, Paul gives the just and proper response to those truths; we will do the good works God has prepared for us. When considering Lent, we usually think of self-denial and solemnity. Where Bloy made those his entire lifestyle, we struggle to implement them in even the smallest of ways. But Lent—or self-denial or solemnity—are not exclusive from joy.

We should deny ourselves some things, but not just for the sake of self-denial. We do it to fight addiction and idolatry. Or, better yet, we give things up, generously and joyfully, so that others may also partake in God's riches. As the writer of Hebrews tells us, it was "for the joy that was set before him" that Jesus "endured the cross."

Make no mistake, we should be solemn and serious. There is much work to do, and enemies are everywhere. But the God of the universe is in our camp. We are joyful in our solemnity because, while we are serious about victory, the victory is already won. The cross of Jesus made that indefatigably so.

But give Bloy some credit here. He is spot on. We are called to be nothing short of heroes and saints. We are called to be so selfless and sacrificial that we'd be confused with heroes. Regardless of money, time, energy, safety, party or any other silly excuse. I cringe at how much more pig I have been than hero. But being selfless, serious heroes and saints—in and out of Lent—is nothing but exciting and joyful if we take God at His word.

Bloy seemed to have lived a life of Lent without understanding the beauty of Lent. While Lent is serious, deep, and profound, it is also a joyful season where we remember the promises, put off trivialities, repent of our addictions and idols, and, as representatives of the Christ whose identities are rooted in the cross, become true heroes and saints to those around us.

## Collect

*Gracious Father, whose blessed Son Jesus Christ came down from heaven to be the true bread which gives life to the world: Evermore give us this bread, that he may live in us, and we in him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.*

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# Readings

## *Sunday*

PS 66, 67, 19, 46  
GEN 48:8-22  
ROM 8:11-25  
JOHN 6:27-40

## *Monday*

PSALMS 56, 57, 58,  
64, 65  
GEN 41:46-57  
1 COR 4:8-21

## *Tuesday*

PSALMS 61, 62, 68:1-36  
GEN 42:1-17  
1 COR 5:1-8  
MARK 3:19-35

## *Wednesday*

PSALMS 72, 119:73-96  
GEN 42:18-28  
1 COR 5:9--6:8  
MARK 4:1-20

## *Thursday*

PSALMS 70, 71, 74  
GEN 42:29-38  
1 COR 6:12-20  
MARK 4:21-34

## *Friday*

PSALMS 95, 69, 73  
GEN 43:1-15  
1 COR 7:1-9  
MARK 4:35-41

## *Saturday*

PSALMS 75, 76, 23, 27  
GEN 43:16-34  
1 COR 7:10-24  
MARK 5:1-20

*“The love of God does not find, but creates, that which is pleasing to it.”*

*Martin Luther*

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## WEEK FIVE

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*Elizabeth Cooper*

# On Glory & the Cross

John speaks of a strange glory, the glory of sacrifice and losing your life. In comparison, the world's glory comes through achievement and human recognition. Because I excelled according to the world's standards, I allowed competition to become an unhealthy thing in my life. Being at the top was so important that I couldn't enjoy the success of others. Comparing myself to others was the measure of my self-worth. Christian mentors pointed this out and I tried unsuccessfully to change. My husband also excelled in the most competitive environments, and so we reinforced the other's values.

God blessed us by turning our definition of success and self-worth upside down. He gave us a son with special needs who wasn't going to be a worldly success. No road map for the future was provided. Everything was hard and nothing came automatically to our son. But we learned to celebrate every little success, sometimes years in the making. We were learning that God doesn't love us for our worldly accomplishments, but He loves us because He creates us.

At times, we felt totally diminished by our sacrifices. But God was coming at us from the inside out. Because of Christ's sacrifice, his strange glory on a certain Friday afternoon, we knew we weren't sacrificing into thin air, but into the hands of a loving God who creates and sustains life, resurrects life, and makes new hearts. The cross is the place of passover from Jeremiah's old covenant to his new covenant. The resurrection ratifies the sacrificial love Christ displayed on the cross for all of us. God shares that love with us by creating clean hearts within us.

What begins at birth is God's love completed at the cross and shared with us as we repent. David says our sacrifice is a contrite heart. Repentance allows our worldly values and sin to become the place where God enters and heals and transforms our hearts. There is no time in which God is so personally present as in repentance and forgiveness. The cross becomes the place where our identities are fully realized. Giving up worldly notions of success freed us to see the reflection of God in all human beings. When our son went to a school for special needs young adults we thrilled in cheering each student on and cried and laughed with other parents who shared their stories with us.

I still enjoy excelling at my work. But the burden of unhealthy competition and desire for human applause is much less. I love the freedom to applaud others and help them to succeed. I still attempt to do too much according to the world's standards and fail in my own attempts to change. But when, with the writer of Hebrews, I approach the throne of grace

boldly and ask for God's help, the Holy Spirit breathes his love into my heart, drawing me to repentance. And as I inhale his divine love, He transforms my heart pulling me a little further into God's new covenant life of freedom, an identity shaped by the cross. Through Christ, our great high priest, we are loved into a new way of being. John was right. It is indeed a strange, but beautiful glory.

## Collect

*Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.*

## Readings

### *Sunday*

PSALMS 118, 145  
EX 3:16--4:12  
ROM 12:1-21  
JOHN 8:46-59

### *Monday*

PSALMS 31, 35  
EX 4:40-31  
1 COR 14:1-19  
MARK 9:30-41

### *Tuesday*

PSALMS 120, 121, 122,  
123, 124, 125, 126  
EX 5:1--6:1  
1 COR 14:20-40  
MARK 9:42-50

### *Wednesday*

PSALMS 119:145-176,  
128, 129, 130  
EX 7:8-24  
2 COR 2:14--3:6  
MARK 10:1-16

### *Thursday*

PSALMS 131, 132, 133,  
140, 142  
EX 7:25--8:19  
2 COR 3:7-18  
MARK 10:17-31

### *Friday*

PSALMS 95, 22, 141,  
143:1-12  
EX 9:13-35  
2 COR 4:1-12  
MARK 10:32-45

### *Saturday*

PSALMS 137:1-9, 144,  
42, 43  
EX 10:21--11:8  
2 COR 4:13-18  
MARK 10:46-52

05

## WEEK SIX

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*Jacob Graudin*

# On Peaks & Processions

The final days of Jesus' ministry are bookended by two mountaintops. On the first he shines brightly, is met by two of the greatest saints of the Jewish people, and is proclaimed the Son of God. On the second he hangs naked from a tree, bandits on either side of him, and is mocked as a fraud. Between these two peaks, a procession winds through the streets of Jerusalem.

The Palm Sunday entry to the City of Peace reeks with the bloody odor of irony, as Jesus, revealed to his disciples as the Christ, rides to apparent victory on a donkey. We have grown so familiar with the scenario that the bitterness of it is lost on us. Donkeys are a sign of peaceful entry, and yet Jerusalem is dominated by forces, both religious and civil, human and spiritual, that oppose Jesus with every fiber of their beings. They will tear him limb from limb.

The disciples, however, are blissfully ignorant of this imminent threat, despite Jesus' thrice-repeated prophecy that he will be betrayed, killed, and resurrected. In their minds, they are on the way to a coronation, cheered on by an adoring mass crying out in support of their rabbi. Not only that, but they are on the way to take up their own places of honor, ruling over the Israelites under the authority of their King Jesus. One can imagine Peter, James, and John thinking of the transfigured Jesus on the mountaintop and placing themselves at his right hand of power. Their identities are conflated with the inevitable ascension of Jesus the Christ.

As we know, Palm Sunday is not a procession to a coronation but a crucifixion. The disciples' identity, bound up in the promise of Jesus' triumph, comes crashing down in Judas' betrayal, Peter's denial, and the rest of the disciples (sans John) scattering like roaches. Jesus dies on a Roman cross, raised high above the Hill of the Skull. The Nazarene, the promised Messiah, is hung on a tree for all to witness and to revile.

And yet, as awfully ironic as this is, the greatest irony is what happens through the crucifixion. It is through this wretched joke of a death that Jesus fulfills his role as the delivering Messiah, the true King of the Jews. He pays the price for sin, he defeats Satan and all the rebel elohim, and he destroys death. He brings his people out of exile and returns them to their God. The two mountaintops become different expressions of the same reality: Jesus is the Son of God.

It is here that the disciples' identity, even in relationship to Jesus, is revealed to be insuffi-

cient, self-centered, and sinful. Their misguided expectations of vindication, having been obliterated by the disappointment of death, are reworked into something deeper, something greater, and something far more glorious than an earthly dynasty. Instead, they become members of a renewed humanity, a royal priesthood whose end is the eternal enjoyment and glorification of the God who made them. Their identities are now distinctly shaped by the cross.

This is the great truth of Lent: our identities, all we possess, and all we are has been swallowed up by Jesus' work on the cross for our redemption. And, of course, this identity informs the action of our lives. We are surrounded by a world whose greatest desire is to have their deep longing for God met. As Christians, our charge is to lay down our lives, pick up our own crosses, and take our neighbors to the cross, the only place where their longing will be satisfied. This work will not end until Jesus returns, and it can so easily turn into disillusionment akin to the disciples' if we lose sight of the cross. Nevertheless, if our identity is found in the finished work of Jesus, taking up our crosses for the life of the world will be our satisfaction, our fulfillment, and our joy.

## Collect

*Almighty and everliving God, in your tender love for the human race you sent your Son our Savior Jesus Christ to take upon him our nature, and to suffer death upon the cross, giving us the example of his great humility: Mercifully grant that we may walk in the way of his suffering, and also share in his resurrection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

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# Readings

## *Sunday*

PSALMS 24, 29, 103  
ZECH 12:9-11; 13:1, 7-9  
TIM 6:12-16  
LUKE 19:41-48

## *Monday*

PS 51:1-20, 69:1-23  
LAM 1:1-2, 6-12  
2 COR 1:1-7  
MARK 11:12-25

## *Tuesday*

PSALMS 6, 12, 94  
LAM 1:17-22  
2 COR 1:8-22  
MARK 11:27-33

## *Wednesday*

PSALMS 55, 74  
LAM 2:1-9  
2 COR 1:23--2:11  
MARK 12:1-11

## *Thursday*

PSALMS 102, 142, 143  
LAM 2:10-18  
1 COR 10:14-17;  
11:27-32  
MARK 14:12-25

## *Friday*

PS 95, 22, 40:1-19, 54  
LAM 3:1-9, 19-33  
1 PET 1:10-20  
JOHN 13:36-38;  
19:38-42

## *Saturday*

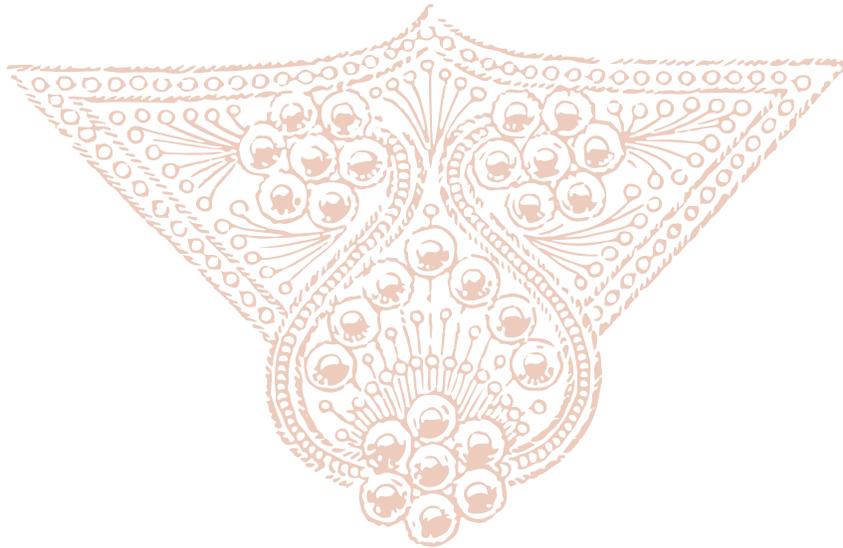
PSALMS 95, 88, 27  
LAM 3:37-58  
HEB 4:1-16  
ROM 8:1-11

06

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*“Lent is like a long ‘retreat’ during which we can turn back into ourselves and listen to the voice of God, in order to defeat the temptations of the Evil One. It is a period of spiritual ‘combat’ which we must experience alongside Jesus, not with pride and presumption, but using the arms of faith: prayer, listening to the word of God and penance. In this way we will be able to celebrate Easter in truth, ready to renew the promises of our Baptism.”*

*Pope Benedict XVI*



*“I have flunked Lent. I flunk it every year.”*

*Fleming Rutledge*



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