

Five Simple Prayer Ideas to Enrich Your Lent

by Joel Schorn

*L*ent takes us to the heart of our faith. As we prepare to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, we try to do things to bring us closer to God and one another. And one of the best things we can do is pray.

Prayer is simply turning to God. To deepen your prayer life and make prayer more a part of your life, put prayer on your daily "to do" list this Lent. Tell yourself that you will find a few moments every day to pray. Here are five ways to help you get started.

Enriching your prayer life

◆ **Mark your day with prayer.** Jesus told his disciples about their need "to pray always" (Luke 18:1). How can you pray always, especially in the midst of the busyness that consumes your days?

One simple way is to pick a time of day to pray. Some days you'll find the time right after you wake up to be best. Other days it may be in the evening when you return home from the day's activities, or just before you go to bed. Whenever you do it, marking the day with prayer helps you to turn to God and be aware of following God's way in your daily journey.

In the morning find a prayer—or come up with your own—to dedicate your day to God. In the evening, give thanks for the day. Before going to sleep, ask for God's protection and to rest in Christ's peace. You can also pray throughout the day by making everything you do a prayer—not only your words but your thoughts and actions as well.

Many churches have prayer books or worship books, like the *Liturgy of the Hours* or the *Book of*

Common Prayer, that contain prayers for morning and evening. Check with your pastor or someone else who works at your church for some suggestions.

◆ **Pray with scripture.** Reading the Bible is a great way to keep the days of Lent, and by praying with the scripture you read, you let the word of God speak to you on a daily basis. One easy method of praying with the Bible is the ancient practice of *lectio divina*, or "holy reading." But first you need to decide what parts of scripture you're going to read.

Creating your own prayer experience

"For God alone my soul awaits in silence...." (Psalm 62:1). In contemplative prayer we take some time to get beyond the noise and busyness of the world and listen to silence. There, too, we may hear the voice of God.

- Ask the Holy Spirit to give you a word that expresses your intention to accept God's presence within. An example of such a word is *peace*.
- Sit comfortably with your eyes closed, settle briefly, and then introduce the word into your mind.
- When thoughts or images or sounds come into your mind, say the word gently to yourself and thereby let go of the thoughts, returning to silence.
- After about 20 minutes, remain in silence with your eyes closed for a couple of minutes, basking in the silence and the inner calm you feel.

If your church has set Bible readings for Sundays and weekdays, use those for your daily reading. Otherwise, you can pick some favorite Bible stories or passages. Another idea: Pick one of the gospels and each day pray with a few verses, reading your way through the story of Jesus' journey toward his death and resurrection.

"Pray without ceasing."

—1 Thessalonians 5:17

Once you have a passage from the Bible with which you want to pray, start by asking for God's help in making the scripture message part of your life. Come up with your own prayer, or use something like the traditional prayer to the Holy Spirit: "Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love."

Read the Bible passage you have chosen. Then read it again, slowly, noticing what stands out and speaks to you. Turn over in your mind what has struck you, and talk with God about its significance for your life. Listen for what comes from deep within you, and from God.

♦ ***Do some spiritual reading, listening, and viewing.*** Ask friends, family, or members of your church to recommend some good reading for Lent. Or go to a Christian bookstore and get some recommendations. Find something you can read in small sections each day, something short enough

to finish by Easter. Purchase some inspirational books on tape from a local religious bookstore, and have them on while you're cleaning, cooking, or driving. Rent a movie that has inspired you, and share it with others.

♦ ***Pray with others.*** In the Book of Acts, we read that the first Christians "were constantly devoting themselves to prayer" (Acts 1:14). From the earliest days of the Church, Christians have come together to pray.

During Lent, it is especially valuable to connect more closely with a worshipping community. You can try a few things to help make worship more prayerful. During the week, pray with the scripture for the upcoming Sunday; this practice will deepen your hearing of scripture and your appreciation of the sermon. Pray before church, asking God to open your heart, and after church, thanking God for all God's gifts. Most of all, put yourself in the frame of mind that what you do in church on Sunday is prayer. Your singing, spoken prayers, even your posture and how you greet other people—everything—can be prayer.

Consider joining a prayer group or small faith community. Your congregation or parish may already have small prayer groups up and running. If so, find out more about them and join up, if what they're doing suits you. Or start your own. Gather a group to

"What a Christian does at all times should be done now with greater care and devotion."

—Saint Leo the Great
(d. 461 A.D.),
speaking of Lent

meet once a week for whatever form of prayer you're comfortable with.

♦ ***Go on a retreat—maybe even online.*** On several occasions Jesus felt the need to get away and pray. "In the morning...he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed" (Mark 1:35). Jesus "went up on the mountain to pray" (Mark 6:45-46). And Luke tells in his gospel of how Jesus "would withdraw to deserted places and pray" (Luke 5:16).

Lent is a good time to go on a retreat—to get away and pray. To make a retreat, you usually go to a retreat house or other religious facility, either by yourself or with others, where you stay for a day, weekend, or longer, and where time is given over to prayer, rest, reading, and sometimes talks given on spiritual subjects by retreat leaders. You have a chance to recharge your spiritual batteries, focus on what is most important in your life, and have some time away from the responsibilities and pressures of daily life so that when you return, you are refreshed and inspired to live your faith more fully.

And you don't have to "go away" to make a retreat. In fact, you don't even have to leave your computer. If you have access to the internet, several excellent online retreats are available. You can participate in them from home or work, at any time of the day or night, at whatever level of involvement or time commitment you wish. Searching on the internet for retreats will return

results about both locations of retreat centers and retreats you can take part in online.

*L*ifting your heart to God

During Lent we make a special effort to practice our faith. By the daily practice of prayer—in whatever way of praying is best for you—we not only pray more, but we also become more prayerful, something we can keep doing throughout the year. May your prayer this Lent be a blessing to you and those around you! ♦

Exploring further

Book: *Seven Last Words: Lenten Reflections for Today's Believers* by Alice Camille, Chicago, ACTA Publications, 1998.

Website: One of the most popular online retreats is operated out of Ireland by the Jesuits, a Catholic religious order; log on to "Daily Prayer Online" at www.jesuit.ie/prayer.

Joel Schorn is managing editor of TrueQuest Communications in Chicago, publishers of Prepare the Word, a homily preparation resource. With Alice Camille he is the coauthor of a forthcoming book from Loyola Press on alienated Catholics. He can be reached at jschorn@truequest.biz.

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