

With Open Hands

Forty Ways to Pray Lent

by Joyce Rupp

Introduction

When I was young I was taught that “prayer is talking to God.” Since then, I’ve learned that to pray is to develop a relationship with God. There are many ways to encourage, sustain, and enhance a relationship. We can pray in spoken words or silence, with our actions or in our quiet receptivity, by singing or with physical gestures. When we pray we bring our whole self to God. No part of our life is left out. Some of the suggestions in this booklet may not seem like “prayer,” but if you look closely, each one is a source of being more intimately united with God.

Prayer involves a place, posture, time, and intention. Choose your Lenten prayer place. Decide on a posture for each day (whether standing, sitting, kneeling, etc.). Sometimes I will give specific suggestions for this. Settle on the time you will pray each day. Finally, before each day’s prayer, renew the intention of growing in your relationship with God.

Joyce Rupp is the author of *Fresh Bread and Other Gifts of Spiritual Nourishment*, *Praying Our Goodbyes*, and *May I Have This Dance*. All are available from Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, IN 46556, or at your local bookstore. *With All My Heart—Forty Ways to Pray Lent* was written by Joyce Rupp with cover art by Sally Beck, and is published by Creative Communications for the Parish, 1564 Fencorp Drive, Fenton, MO 63026. © Copyright 1995. All rights reserved. The poem *I Am Coming Forth* is from *Fresh Bread and Other Gifts of Spiritual Nourishment* by Joyce Rupp, © 1985 Ave Maria Press. Used with permission. Printed in the USA.

Ash Wednesday

THE PRAYER OF RECEPTIVITY

Return to me with all your heart.

Joel 2:12

Today I receive ashes on my forehead. I receive the humble reminder that I am of the earth, that my body is mortal. I have ashes placed on my forehead—they are given to me and I receive them. This simple gesture of receiving is symbolic of the deeper receptivity that I need in order to return to God. God is constantly offering me the grace to change my ways—if only I am open to receive God's power to do so. This first day of Lent, I open my entire being to the presence of God. I long for the gifts of spiritual growth which will be offered to me.

Prayer

Quiet your mind and body. Open your hands, palms up, on your lap. Be intent upon being open and receptive to God. Let yourself be as open as possible to the power of God.

Thursday after Ash Wednesday

THE PRAYER OF CROSS-CARRYING

If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.

Luke 9:23

If I want to discover my daily cross all I have to do is ask myself a few questions: What would I most like to get rid of in my life? With whom or what am I regularly irritated? Where does my pain, anxiety, stress, confusion or turmoil find its source? My cross may be mental, physical or emotional pain. I ought not simply to endure or fight what is difficult for me but, rather, see my cross as a source of transformation. The cross is a way for me to grow if I will accept it.

Prayer

Today strive to accept the part of your life that feels like a cross. Close your eyes and see yourself carrying the weight of this cross on your shoulders. See Jesus with you, helping you. He lifts the weight and puts his arm around your shoulder. You know you are not alone in this cross-carrying of yours. Jesus is with you.

Friday after Ash Wednesday
THE PRAYER OF FASTING

Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice . . . to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house?
Isaiah 58:6-7

Fasting is essential for spiritual growth. It can be a very helpful way to pray during Lent. Fasting means to choose to deprive myself of whatever keeps me from living the message of Jesus. So fasting is much more than just not eating or drinking certain things. It might be fasting from irritable thoughts about others, from watching television so I can have some time to pray or be with others who need me, from criticizing myself, or from buying something so that I can contribute financially to others. Fasting becomes a prayer whenever I intentionally let it draw me to change my ways so that I am more in tune with Gospel values.

Prayer

Today resolve to fast from something so that you can live the Gospel message better.

Saturday after Ash Wednesday
THE PRAYER OF DISCIPLESHIP

Jesus said to him, "Follow me." And Levi got up, left everything, and followed him.
Luke 5:27-28

What does it mean to be a disciple and to follow Jesus? How can this become a prayer? The description of a disciple is that of "one who listens." This listening to Jesus may start with some ideas or thoughts about the value of being like Jesus. It then moves to an interior movement of the heart, an attraction or a desire. This is followed with a decision of my will to take action. I can intellectualize forever and think that it would be a good thing to give my life over to the call of Jesus, to "follow" in his path, but until my heart responds and I truly do live this goodness it is only "head-talk." Discipleship can be a prayer each time I deliberately choose to live and love as Jesus did.

Prayer

Today you can pray your discipleship by making deliberate decisions for good, choices that reflect the way that Jesus lived and loved. What can you do today that will reflect this goodness?

First Sunday of Lent
THE PRAYER OF THE DESERT

Jesus remained in the desert for forty days
Mark 1:13

The Spirit urged Jesus to head for the wilderness to pray about his life. He was sorely tempted there, but he was also ministered to by angels. The desert can be a desolate, bleak, lonely place—as can the desert places of our lives with their struggle, pain, isolation, and confusion. Here we can be tempted to lose our personal integrity or to hand over our truth or our values. Our desert times can be powerful times of prayer because we are often vulnerable and unable to cope by ourselves. Thomas Merton believed that it was in these desert times that we pray best because we have to throw ourselves into God’s arms and rely totally on God to help us overcome our adversity.

Prayer

Today choose a place in your life that feels like wilderness and desert. Go there in spirit. Visit it with your angel by your side for protection and guidance. Entrust your situation to the One who can empower you and fill you with strength so that you can overcome the obstacles and temptations in your life.

Monday, First Week of Lent
THE PRAYER OF LOVE

Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.
Matthew 25:40

When the Gulf War first began, I was conducting a retreat at a facility that had a lovely back yard with a circular walk amid a grove of pine trees. I was distraught, thinking of all the bombing and killing that was taking place. I went for a walk among the trees even though it was a wintry cold day. I walked and walked the circle. As I did so, the lines of a song returned to my heart: “Love is the only power, love is the only way, love, love, our love, give our love away.” I began humming the words to that song. As I did so, I joined my heart to all the people in the world who were at war with one another. I took each country and held the people to my heart where I knew the Spirit of Jesus dwelt.

Prayer

Pause to hear Jesus urging you to reach out and love those who need your kindness. Welcome God's love and hold it in your heart. Make a deliberate decision to be more aware today as you meet the love of Jesus in each person.

Tuesday, First Week of Lent

THE PRAYER OF DEEPENING RELATIONSHIP

Jesus said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

Matthew 16:15

Marcus Borg, in the challenging and inspiring book entitled *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time*, describes Jesus as one whose relationship with the Spirit was the source of everything that he was. Jesus' whole life was rooted in this relationship. All that he said and did found its source in a bondedness with the Spirit. This insight helps to create a desire in me to know Jesus even more intimately. It also disturbs me because it shakes me out of my complacency. It leads me to reflect on my life, to question if I give enough time and energy to my relationship with Jesus. I find myself searching for how to continue to deepen and strengthen this connection. I want my life to find its inspiration and direction from this Source of Love and to have my life, too, rooted in the Spirit.

Prayer

Write a letter to Jesus about your relationship with him.

Wednesday, First Week of Lent

THE PRAYER OF MERCY

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.

Psalm 51:1

Most of us can come up rather quickly with a list of our inadequacies and our sins. What is much more difficult, I think, is to be fully aware of the merciful compassion of God. This steadfast love is enduring, faithful, unending, solid, firm and unwavering. This is the stance which God takes toward us no matter what kind of failings and sinfulness fill our hearts. Too often we are tempted to say "yes, but ..." when we read or hear of God's great mercy. Today is the time to believe in the great tenderness of God.

Prayer

Take either a kneeling or standing position, with bowed head. Reflect on what keeps you from being a man or woman of love. See where you've failed and where you need to grow. Hold your hands out and give all of this to God. Let God take it from you and place forgiveness and peace in your hands. Hold your hands to your heart and let God's merciful gifts find a home there.

Thursday, First Week of Lent

THE PRAYER OF COURAGE

Mordecai also gave him a copy of the written decree issued in Susa for their (the Jews') destruction, that he might show it to Esther . . . and charge her to go to the king to make supplication to him and entreat him for her people.

Esther 4:8

Queen Esther was faced with many dangers for herself and her people. She is said to have turned to God in prayer and pleaded for courage to have the right words to persuade her enemies not to act. In a prayer attributed to her, Esther asked to be delivered from her fear. Such prayer holds a lesson for us all. In times of anxiety, we can easily tend to fret and stew, forgetting to turn to God who is our courage and our strength in times of trial. We allow our fears to take over our thoughts and emotions instead of opening ourselves to the One who is peace and guidance.

Prayer

The direction of the north, with its cold, wintry, dark months, has long been considered a place of courage. Stand and face north quietly for five minutes. Let your heart be open and attentive to the Divine Indwelling. You are standing strong in the love of God who gives you courage.

Friday, First Week of Lent

THE PRAYER OF RECONCILIATION

First be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.

Matthew 5:24

This may not be an easy or comfortable prayer today. It requires bringing to mind those from whom we are alienated or whom we have set apart from our lives. To be reconciled does not necessarily mean that one resumes a personal relationship with "the enemy," but it does ask for a change of heart. It is impossible to do so all by ourselves. If we bring God our desire to be reconciled, we are already moving toward peace of heart.

Prayer

Sit with your hands upon your lap, palms up. Mentally place yourself in one palm and your enemy in the other palm. Hold both hands outward and ask God to bless each with love. Then, gently entwine the fingers of one hand with the other as a sign of your willingness to be reconciled.

Saturday, First Week of Lent

THE PRAYER OF WALKING IN GOD'S WAYS

You are to walk in God's ways.

Deuteronomy 26:17

To walk is to make some deliberate movement in a particular direction. To walk in God's ways is to make a definite decision about wanting to walk through life with a heart like Jesus' and then to let God post the road signs for us along the way (e. g., "Patience this way," "Compassion over here.>"). We must be alert for these signs for they come in many forms, such as the teachings of Jesus, people's comments, the seasons of the earth, personal prayer, communal worship, or quiet intuitions and insights. I believe that almost anyone or anything can be a signpost for us on our spiritual path. What is significant is that we desire to walk in God's ways. We need to be deliberate in our choices for good, whether for ourselves or for others.

Prayer

Go for a slow walk outdoors or walk slowly within your prayer room. Deliberately turn your mind, heart, and will to God. Repeat slowly: "I will walk in your ways, O God."

Second Sunday of Lent

THE PRAYER OF CONTEMPLATION

Jesus took Peter, James, and John and led them up a high mountain apart by themselves. And he was transfigured before them.

Mark 9:2

What an astounding moment for these three disciples as they experienced the transfiguration of Jesus! They knew him, for a brief time, in a radically different way. Contemplation involves going apart, if not physically, at least mentally. It means being present to God as the three disciples were. The difficult part of this way of praying is that our lives are usually so rushed and busy that we rarely call a halt and just look intently at our life with God. When we do stop, our minds are still racing and we can easily get discouraged because “nothing happens.” It takes time and practice to contemplate and we cannot force God’s revelation. When we do see in a new way, it is pure gift.

Prayer

Teresa of Avila had a way of praying in which she just sat and beheld Jesus in front of her. She saw Jesus looking upon her with intense love. Try this prayer today. See Jesus contemplate you with great love.

Monday, Second Week of Lent

THE PRAYER OF GENEROSITY

Do not judge and you will not be judged ... Give and it will be given to you.

Luke 6:37-38

Jesus urged the disciples to be generous with their non-judgment, mercy, and compassion. He assured them that they would receive back what they had given. As I reflect on these words of Jesus, I ask myself: What is most essential for me to give generously today? My kindness? My mercy? My forgiveness? My understanding? All I have to do is to think about the various people I know, observing how I feel and what thoughts I have about each one. I quickly know how generous or stingy I am with my love.

Prayer

Begin by acknowledging how generous God has been to you. Reflect upon the abundance of God’s grace and goodness. Rest for a while in this generous Love. Let yourself absorb the wonders of God’s graciousness toward you. Now look into your life and notice where you withhold your gifts of love. Who is most in need of the generosity of your heart? Who most often gets left out? Close your eyes and picture yourself being generous toward someone who needs your non-judgment and your kindness.

Tuesday, Second Week of Lent
THE PRAYER OF REPENTANCE

Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good. Isaiah 1:16-17

On the Lenten day last year when this Scripture passage was proclaimed, I had walked out into a winter wonderland on the way to church. Everything was covered with a fresh, deep, white snowfall. The earth was quiet with this unsullied blanket of beauty. In this silent space of morning loveliness, my mind turned to the words of Isaiah. I saw the wintered land as an image of my inner world when I repent of my wrongdoings and receive God's forgiveness. When I acknowledge with sorrow how I have deliberately gone against God's ways or have omitted doing good, it is like receiving a fresh, clean start. I repent of my wrongdoings, and God refreshes my soul with merciful forgiveness.

Prayer

Kneel down in your place of prayer or else sit with bowed head. Acknowledge your wrongdoings to God. Then, listen to God speak these words to you: "Come now, let us set things right ... though your sins be like scarlet, they may become white as snow" (Isaiah 1:18). Rise from your prayer with a fresh, clean start for the day.

Wednesday, Second Week of Lent
THE PRAYER OF SERVICE

Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant ... just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve ...
Matthew 20:26, 28

Jesus touched many lives in his short lifetime. He taught and healed and helped countless people in his ministry. Yet, it was not only what he did, it was how he did it. Jesus came among the people as a loving, caring individual. He looked with eyes of compassion. He served not out of pity or duty or what others might think but, rather, with a sense of loving relatedness.

Prayer

The prayer of service begins in the heart and then extends to action. Today pray by meeting others with loving openness. Pray your service, not so much by taking on extra things to do for others but, rather, by fully entering into each personal encounter. Whether on the telephone, in the store, at the desk, or around the kitchen table, your presence with others can be a source of love. Say this prayer: "O Radiant Light, I bow to your presence in myself and in each one I meet today."

Thursday, Second Week of Lent
THE PRAYER OF TRUST

Blessed are those who trust in the Lord ... they shall be like a tree planted by water ... in the year of drought it shows no distress.

Jeremiah 17:7-8

I can read and pray many wonderful Scripture passages which speak of trust in God and yet, when difficult situations happen, I find myself again anxious and worried. I know that anxiety is a natural, human emotion, but worry accomplishes nothing except taking away my emotional energy. Jeremiah offers a powerful image of one who trusts: a tree that is not distressed even though it is a year of drought. Why? Because it is planted by a stream and its roots are in the waters. If my heart is rooted in the waters of God's love, I do not need to be anxious or distressed. I can trust that whatever happens in my life, God will always be there to supply what I need for spiritual growth.

Prayer

Sit quietly with God. Look within and recall the power of God's presence. It is like water feeding the roots of a thirsty tree. Rest in this truth for a while. Then, look for any fear or anxiety you may have. Allow God's power to surround it and embrace it with loving kindness.

Friday, Second Week of Lent
THE PRAYER OF SELF-ESTEEM

Finally he sent his son to them, saying, "They will respect my son!" But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, "This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and get his inheritance."

Matthew 21:37-38

We have all been rejected at various times in our lives. It may have been by someone ridiculing our beliefs or values, laughing at how we live our lives or at what we wear or how we look. It may be the deep wounding rejection of not being accepted within one's own family. If we can love ourselves well, we will not place so much importance on what others think of us or what they say about us. Good self-esteem is a must in life. We need to begin with our own self-acceptance—and not reject ourselves.

Prayer

Write down all of your lovable qualities. Thank God for creating you as you are. Each time you look in the mirror today, pause to pray: "Thank you, God, for creating me as I am. I know that I am not perfect, but I also know that I am good and that I am lovable. Help me to not place so much emphasis on what others think and say about me."

Saturday, Second Week of Lent

THE PRAYER OF WELCOMING

And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them."

Luke 15:2

Jesus surprised, challenged, and distressed many self-righteous persons by his marvelous way of welcoming and accepting rejected people. I used to label people who were different from myself as "weird," "strange," or "bizarre." I was not very welcoming to persons of different skin color, religion, or ways of living. All this changed for me when I began studying world religions. I was humbled and in awe of how people of many different races and creeds also longed for God and were much more faithful to their religious practices than I was to mine. I wondered how Jesus would welcome these very ones who are so often rejected by those who think they have "the best way" to God.

Prayer

Stand by an open door in your home, perhaps in the living room where you would welcome your guests. As you stand there, pray to have the heart of welcome which Jesus had. Invite the unwanted and the unacceptable ones of the earth into your heart.

Third Sunday of Lent

THE PRAYER OF THIRSTING FOR GOD

If you knew the gift of God and who is saying to you, "Give me a drink," you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.

John 4:10

The Samaritan woman at the well did not realize that the seeking and struggling within her was actually a deep longing for God. Jesus not only helped her to recognize this, but he also gave her a taste of the living water of himself as he tended to her with love. Somewhere deep inside of us there is a great thirst for God, too. We may not feel it or have a conscious longing for God, but it is there. We may try to take care of this thirst by filling ourselves with food, drink, books, shopping, sex, or anything that we pursue relentlessly in the hope of being fully satisfied or happy. Yet, nothing can take the place of the living water of God for which our soul longs.

Prayer

Sit with a glass of water and sip it slowly. As you sip the water, let each sip be a prayer of longing for the living water of God. During the day you may want to deprive your body of water or other liquids for a period of time in order to be reminded of your deeper thirst for God.

Monday, Third Week of Lent

THE PRAYER OF CLEANSING

Go and wash seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will heal, and you will be clean.
2 Kings 5:10

The prophet Elisha told the leper Naaman to wash in the river seven times in order to be healed. Naaman thought this rather silly, but he did it and he was cured of his disease. Ritual washing or cleansing is a significant part of many religions. External washing is used to represent the inner cleansing that also needs to take place in the person seeking healing. Such things as the grime of selfishness, the dust of old hurts, the grit of mistrust, and the scum of jealousy all smear the windows of our soul. Each time we use water to cleanse ourselves it can be a prayer for healing and wholeness if we deliberately attune our minds and hearts to God. Like Naaman, we may need to pray this many times before we sense that we are changed. Inner healing can take a long time.

Prayer

Deliberately and mindfully wash your face, your hands, your arms, and your feet—symbolic of your whole person. As you do this washing, pray to have your inner self also cleansed and purified: “Thoroughly wash me from my guilt and of my sin cleanse me” (Psalm 51:2).

Tuesday, Third Week of Lent
THE PRAYER OF FORGIVENESS

How often must I forgive?
Matthew 18:21

As Christians, we know that one essential aspect of our religion is that we must forgive others. Personally, I have never found this an easy task. I'd rather blame the other person, hold grudges, and stay angry than to begin the process of forgiveness. What I have learned, however, is that when I do not forgive, I am really punishing myself as well as the other person. I am filling my mind and heart with deadening emotions rather than with life-giving ones when I harbor non-forgiveness within me. No wonder Jesus so strongly urged us to forgive. To do this is to be kind both to others and to ourselves.

Prayer

Recall the person(s) you need to forgive. Ask God to fill you with a willingness to forgive. Place your hand over your forehead as a sign of your desire to rid yourself of negative thoughts. Place your hand over your heart as a sign of your desire to let go of your negative emotions.

Wednesday, Third Week of Lent
THE PRAYER OF REMEMBRANCE

Take care ... not to forget the things which your own eyes have seen, nor let them slip from your memory as long as you live.
Deuteronomy 4:9

Moses encouraged the people to keep their experiences of God close to their hearts and to share these treasured memories with their children. These memories would help them to not forget what God asked of them. Remembering our goals and values can be difficult to do in a world that is cluttered with busyness, greed and violence. Yet, deep within us, our soul knows that it belongs, first of all, to God. Today we pray to remember our rootedness in God and our strong connectedness to this Source of love and goodness.

Prayer

Remember who taught you about God and how you developed your faith. Recall the values that you hold dear. Take three deliberate pauses during this day (morning, noontime, bedtime) to recall your rootedness in God. Ask God to keep you mindful of your deepest truths and values.

Thursday, Third Week of Lent
THE PRAYER OF CHOICE

Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.
Luke 11:23

Every choice and decision we make in this life could be one that moves us toward or away from the teachings of Jesus. We do many things out of habit or unconsciously without a deliberate choice. In order to make good choices, we must develop a greater awareness of the decisions that are ours and notice whether or not the choices we make reflect our Christian values. These choices may be “little ones,” such as deciding whether or not to honk our horn when we are angry at another driver or choosing whether or not to harbor mean thoughts about someone else when we are irritated. Even these little decisions affect our relationship with God.

Prayer

Light a candle. Sit with it and ask God to be your Light, to help you be more aware of your choices for good throughout the day. In the evening, look back over the day and notice your actions. What kind of choices did you make? Were they for or against the message of Jesus?

Friday, Third Week of Lent
THE PRAYER OF WHOLENESS

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.
Mark 12:30

It is amazing how one teeny, three-letter word can be so challenging! We are to love God with all of our being. This immediately causes me to look around inside myself and ask, “Is ALL of my heart in union with God?” Actually, I know that there are always places in my life that have yet to welcome God. This is one of the key challenges of spiritual growth: how to accept my human incompleteness and, at the same time, to yearn constantly for greater wholeness, ALL-ness, with God. It is unhealthy to get caught in perfectionism but equally unhealthy to pay little attention to the quality of my relationship with God. Always there needs to be a balance.

Prayer

Write the word “all” on a piece of paper. Place it in your pocket or billfold, or attach it to a piece of your inner clothing. As you do so, pray this prayer: “God, I want to give you ALL of my love. I place this word close to my physical self today as a sign of my longing to be closely united with you.”

Saturday, Third Week of Lent
THE PRAYER OF RE-TURNING

Come, let us return to the Lord ... let us strive to know the Lord.
Hosea 6:1, 3

To re-turn means that one is going back to something familiar. In this case, it is a re-turning to God. This is a comforting thought for me. It suggests that I have already been with God and know this spiritual Home even though I lose my way every now and then. When I re-turn, I deliberately set my steps on the path that leads home to God. The path to God is always available to me. I need only turn and take my steps in that direction.

Prayer

Stand and face any direction you wish. As you stand there, reflect upon your life and notice if there is anything that moves you off center or away from your spiritual path. Pray to let go of these things. Then, deliberately turn around and face another direction. Do this with the intention of re-turning to God. Continue to stand for awhile and to allow God to welcome you back on the path that leads Home.

Fourth Sunday of Lent
THE PRAYER OF SEEING

Then he (the blind man) went and washed and came back able to see.
John 9:7

Our physical eyes are our windows to the world. When we look with our eyes, we bring the world back into us. We also have spiritual eyes which are our windows to God. Thomas Merton spoke of love coming out of God and gathering us back to God. He used the image of windows to describe this and said that we were all windows through which God shines. Thus, we look out through God's eyes of love and those around us look back into us and see God's love reflected there.

Prayer

Sit quietly, close your physical eyes, and look spiritually within the windows of yourself. See God's love shining through you to the world. See God's love shining through others back to you. Enjoy the wonder of this indwelling God. Throughout the day, be aware of yourself and others as windows of God.

Monday, Fourth Week of Lent
THE PRAYER OF BELIEVING

So he himself believed, along with his whole household.
John 4:53

The royal official from Capernaum had a strong faith which Jesus admired. Something deep inside of him knew that he could take Jesus at his word. He truly believed in Jesus. When the Creed is being recited, I sometimes stop saying the words and listen. It usually sounds like robots rattling off a lot of words with little or no thought or emotion. I often wonder what would happen if the celebrant stopped this recital and said to the people: “What do you believe?” Wouldn’t it be a marvelous experience to hear the personal witness of those gathered as they told of their own faith in Jesus and how it had come to happen?

Prayer

Write your own Creed today. Begin with the words: “I believe . . .” Write whatever it is that you most deeply believe about God, about the basics of your religion, about life, about yourself.

Tuesday, Fourth Week of Lent
THE PRAYER OF HEALING

Jesus said to him, “Do you want to be made well?”
John 5:6

Jesus went up to Jerusalem and as he walked along he came across a person who had been ill for thirty-eight years. Imagine it—thirty-eight years of never feeling well. That’s a long time! This person is symbolic of our inner selves and the wounds or hurts that we carry for many years. Usually these old memories and barriers to peace are never cured instantly. It takes a long time to be healed. The big question is the one which Jesus asked: “Do you WANT to be well?” i.e., “Do you want to let go of the inner hurts, turmoil, anxiety, which keep you from being peace-filled and free?” What is our response? Are we willing to let go?

Prayer

Pause to see Jesus with you, lovingly asking you the question: “Do you want to get well?” Talk with Jesus about any inner pain or hurt you carry within you. Ask to be healed. Then, place a band-aid on your body. Do this with the intention of receiving God’s healing touch. Wear this all day as a reminder of your desire to be healed of old hurts.

Wednesday, Fourth Week of Lent
THE PRAYER OF COMFORT

Can a mother forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb?

Isaiah 49:15

The forty-ninth chapter of Isaiah portrays God as a comforting and caring Presence. God's love is compared to the tender and secure bond between a mother and child, a mother who will never forget her child. In this passage, Isaiah also depicts God as providing for those who are in want. God promises that the people will be nurtured daily. Colleen Fulmer sings about this beautiful portrayal of God in her song "Rest In My Wings." The refrain encourages all who need the comfort of God: "Don't be afraid. I'm holding you close in the darkness." It is the love song of our God, who like a devoted mother, cradles us tenderly and loves us dearly.

Prayer

Picture yourself resting in the arms of God. Take comfort in this magnanimous Presence. Let yourself be loved. Open your entire being to the nourishment, protection, and guidance which God promises to provide for you.

Thursday, Fourth Week of Lent
THE PRAYER OF TESTIMONY

These works that I perform testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me.
John 5:36

One day I met a good friend at a restaurant for lunch. After the waiter brought our meals to the table, we paused and offered a prayer of thanksgiving for the nourishment of food and friendship. Just as we finished, we found the waiter had returned and was standing there watching us. He said, "Oh, I don't mind waiting. It's wonderful to see people who still pray." Later, as we completed the meal, he came and said, "There's no charge. This one is on me. You gave me such hope by your prayer." Needless to say, my friend and I were quite amazed by the experience. It caused us both to recognize that whatever we say or do, wherever we are, we are giving testimony to our beliefs and values.

Prayer

Think back over the past week. How did your life give witness or testimony to your following Jesus? Ask Jesus for courage and wisdom to give testimony to his teachings by your daily words and actions.

Friday, Fourth Week of Lent
THE PRAYER OF DELIVERANCE

Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord rescues them from them all.
Psalm 34:19

How does God deliver and save those who are afflicted? I spoke with a friend who was recently diagnosed with a rare lung disease. Suddenly her world was turned upside-down with strong doses of medicine and an oxygen tank as a constant companion. She spoke of the frustrations of her physical limitations but she also spoke of her ability to be sustained by God. She had remembered a beautiful art-piece she had not seen for years in which Jesus embraced one who needed healing. This memory gave her great comfort. It was a kind of deliverance, not from her illness, but from the turmoil and distress which threatened to overpower her.

Prayer

Bring your own broken-hearted pieces of life to God. Bring the broken-hearted pieces of the world to God. As you breathe in, pray: "Sustain us, O God." As you breathe out, pray: "Deliver us from turmoil." Repeat the breath prayer for five minutes.

Saturday, Fourth Week of Lent
THE PRAYER OF FACING EVIL

But I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter. And I did not know it was against me that they devised schemes ...
Jeremiah 11:19

Both Jeremiah and Jesus experienced the evil of those who schemed and plotted to destroy them. Their lives were often in danger because of evildoers. People today experience similar terrors. In numerous countries, people fear for their lives because of their skin color or religious or political beliefs. When people try to hurt others, when they try to get even, to get others to fail, or to be diminished, they are taking the part of an evildoer. They become like those who plotted against Jesus and Jeremiah.

Prayer

Pick up the daily newspaper. Find an article about someone who is, or has been, in danger (e.g., victims of racial wars, sexual abuse, political struggles). Take this person, or these people, to the God of compassion and pray for them. Then, bring to God anyone whom you have plotted against or have wished to harm in any way.

Fifth Sunday of Lent
THE PRAYER OF GROWTH

Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it produces much fruit.

John 12:24

Many people want to grow spiritually. Very few want to accept the conditions for it, however. Growth usually includes some pain and letting go, like the seed falling into the dark soil. If we could squeeze inside the heart of a wheat seed, we would be astonished at the potential for growth that is there. If we could see into our own soul, we would also be amazed at our own capacity for growth. Jesus saw into these depths and urged his followers to let go, to fall into the unknown darkness, and to wait for fuller life to evolve. Let us trust in our potential and give ourselves to fuller growth.

Prayer

Sit or stand by a plant, a tree, a garden, or anything green and growing. Notice the soil, the roots, the stem, etc. Touch the stem, trunk, or leaves. Be there in silence as a sign of your willingness to grow and develop your spiritual potential.

Monday, Fifth Week of Lent
THE PRAYER OF COMPASSION

“Has no one condemned you?” She said, “No one, sir.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you.”

John 8:10-11

Compassion means “to stand with” those who suffer. I am always amazed at how well Jesus did this, even with those who were judged as the sinners of his society. Jesus had a keen sense of another’s inner struggle and could see beyond the sinful behavior to the light shining in the soul. He opened his heart in welcome to those whom society condemned. Jesus stood up for the woman and protected her from the hypocritical mob. He also encouraged the woman to mend her ways and “sin no more.” How comforting it must have been to this woman to have someone accept her as she was and to also believe in her enough to ask her to mend her ways!

Prayer

Think of someone you know whom you tend to judge or condemn. Mentally go and stand in compassion by the side of this person. Look within his or her heart and see the struggle that roams inside. Surround this person with love. Then, go to a group in society whom you judge negatively. Extend your loving presence to this group. Be there with the compassion of Jesus.

Tuesday, Fifth Week of Lent
THE PRAYER OF PRESENCE

The one who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone.
John 8:29

Jesus knew he was not alone. The bond he felt with “the one” who had sent him was his greatest strength and support. In the classic, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, Brother Lawrence encourages his readers to develop the habit of recalling the nearness of God. He suggests that we begin by finding a definite time and place each day where we intentionally recall the loving presence of God. Once this becomes a habit for us, we then find another time and place and add it to the previous one. Eventually, we will have numerous moments in our day when we easily connect with God’s nearness to us.

Prayer

Pause quietly to recall that you are never alone. God is with you in this moment. Decide on one or two specific times or places where you will remember God’s nearness today.

Wednesday, Fifth Week of Lent
THE PRAYER OF SONG

I will sing and make melody. Awake, my soul! Awake, O harp and lyre! I will awake the dawn. I will give thanks to you, O Lord, among the peoples; I will sing praises to you among the nations.
Psalm 57:7-9

In the Scriptures, many of the faithful turned to music to express their faith in God’s enduring love and presence. Song can be a powerful way of praying. It comes forth from the heart and mind and is expressed through the body. Song unites our entire being with God. Song is a natural outpouring of the soul when one is filled with amazement at who God is and what God can do. No wonder numerous scriptural persons raised their voices in song as a means of acknowledging the strength and power of God.

Prayer

Hum one of your favorite songs, or play a song on a musical instrument, or listen to a song that speaks to you of God’s magnificence. Let your song be a source of union with God. Let the melody be your way of praising the Creator who has given you life and who supports you in all that occurs for you.

Thursday, Fifth Week of Lent
THE PRAYER OF PROMISE MAKING

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said: "... Between you and me I will establish my covenant ..."
Genesis 17:1-2

One of the central qualities of God in the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament) is that of faithfulness. God makes promises and keeps them. Abraham experienced this and so did Jesus. And both of them, in their difficult moments, trusted in God's promise to provide for what was needed. We are also in a covenant with God, a two-way agreement made through our baptism. God has promised to be a faithful, loving presence. And we? We have promised to be loyal in our love for God and to live in such a way that all know we belong to God. Lent is the time to renew this promise.

Prayer

Review and renew your promises to God. Confirm your promises with the following prayer: "God, promise keeper! Your faithful love inspires me. Help me to dust off my old promises to you so that I can live my faith with enthusiasm and integrity."

Friday, Fifth Week of Lent
THE PRAYER OF PRAISE

Sing to the Lord, praise the Lord! For he has delivered the life of the needy from the hands of evildoers.
Jeremiah 20:13

When we are in the midst of terrible struggle and pain, it feels like we will never be delivered from the turmoil. But the day does come when we are gradually freed of the anguish and hurt. If we look back in faith, we will recognize the hand of God in our process of healing. We will see such things as people, insights, and little revelations and consolations which God brought into our lives in order to heal us. I wonder: Do the people who are healed praise and thank God as often and as intensely as they prayed to be released from their difficulties?

Prayer

Make a litany of praise to God. Thank God for all of the situations which you have gone through and survived. Recall the special qualities of God which helped you in these difficult times. (Patience, guidance, strength ...) Praise God for sharing these qualities with you.

Saturday, Fifth Week of Lent
THE PRAYER OF DWELLING

My dwelling shall be with them; and I will be their God and they shall be my people.
Ezekiel 37:27

The Ark of the Covenant was revered in the Hebrew Scriptures as a sacred dwelling place of God's presence. Some scriptural translations use the word "sanctuary" rather than "dwelling." A sanctuary is a safe haven, a protection for those who seek shelter or safety. Each of us is a sanctuary or a dwelling place of the Divine. We carry God within us as the Israelites once carried the Ark of the Covenant. If we truly believed this, how would our lives change? How would we approach each person we met? What would happen to our relationships? Would we be safe havens for them?

Prayer

Today I will see myself and others as a dwelling place of the Divine Presence. I will quietly bow inside of myself to God who dwells in each one I meet. I begin by bowing to God who dwells within my own spirit.

Palm/Passion Sunday

Today our prayer is to listen intently to the story of Jesus' Passion. As we do so, let us enter into it with our entire being.

Monday of Holy Week
THE PRAYER OF FAREWELL

Little children, I am with you only a little longer.
John 13:33

Jesus tried to prepare the disciples for his Passion and death, but they could not hear what he was saying. He was honest and open about the reality of his impending death, but it was more than they could comprehend. The disciples had too strong a grip on wanting things to stay as they were. It was not easy for Jesus to say farewell because of the deep love he had for the disciples, but he knew that death was a part of his journey home. It is difficult for most everyone to say the final farewell to loved ones. Yet, death is a part of life and must be accepted as the pathway to eternal union with God.

Prayer

Be with Jesus today as you would be with someone who you know is dying. Experience the heartache Jesus felt in having to say good-bye to those he loved deeply.

Tuesday of Holy Week

THE PRAYER OF ANOINTING

Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet and wiped them with her hair.

John 12:3

Mary, the sister of Lazarus, expressed her love for Jesus by blessing his feet with expensive oil. This gesture must have moved Jesus deeply, coming as it did in the midst of his experience of rejection and misunderstanding. There is both comfort and strength in a blessing. The gesture of a blessing speaks of loving care and a desire to wish the blessed one well. The blessing also carries strength with it when it is given with love. Mary took a big risk in anointing Jesus' feet. We, too, take a risk when we reach out and bless someone with our words or gestures of kindness and encouragement. We do not know how our offer will be received. All we can do is extend it with gracious consideration of another.

Prayer

Take the risk as Mary did and bless someone with love today. This can be discreetly done by a smile or a kind word or more openly by a hug or a verbal blessing prayer. Begin by blessing those in your own home.

Wednesday of Holy Week

THE PRAYER OF ONE BETRAYED

And while they were eating, he said, "Amen, I say to you, one of you will betray me."
Matthew 26:21

Jesus sat at the table with his chosen ones, those he had nurtured with friendship and the truth of his teachings, and recognized that the brutal event of betrayal would soon take place. All of us have been betrayed in some way or another. From childhood on, we experience the pain of others who disappoint us, turn their backs on us, take our love, our hopes and dreams, or our gifts, and then toss them away with no regard. This is a good day to remember that Jesus has walked before us on the path of being betrayed.

Prayer

Quiet your body and mind. Sit with Jesus at the table. Notice the pain in his voice as he speaks of one of his own betraying him. Let the deep emotions of this moment sweep through your own heart. Speak to Jesus about this experience of betrayal in his life and in yours.

Maundy Thursday
THE PRAYER OF EUCHARIST

The Lord Jesus ... took bread, and after he had given thanks, broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you."

1 Corinthians 11:23-24

I grew up on a farm in Iowa where hospitality was basic to all of life. No one came to our house without eating before leaving for home. This gesture was received with plenty of "Oh's" and "Ah's" as the visitors ate my mother's delicious food. It would have been rude of them to simply devour the food without being aware of how tasty it was. I think of how rudely I sometimes approach the Eucharist, mindlessly and unaware of the Treasure of Life I am receiving. This day is one of remembrance and gratitude for the wonder of Life-giving Bread.

Prayer

Every morsel of food and drop of liquid can be prayed today. Pause silently before each bite or each drink to be grateful. Pause in the same manner before receiving the gift of the Eucharist.

Good Friday
THE PRAYER OF DESOLATION

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Mark 15:34

Jesus hangs on the cross. It is his time of utter desolation and anguish. He longs for strength, comfort, and solace, yet feels none of this. Instead, he feels empty and abandoned by the One he always counted on to be there for him. Jesus let his pain and hollowness be known. He was not afraid to cry out his truest feelings. We can learn how to pray our own emptiness and pain from Jesus' desolate cry on the cross: be honest with our feelings; take them all to God even though all seems lost; then, give ourselves over to God in trust and surrender.

Prayer

Sit with a cross held in your hands. Unite in love with Jesus in his abandonment and desolation. Bring to this any pain that is a part of your life. Surrender your heart to God and pray: "Into your hands, I commend myself and all who walk the journey of pain today."

Holy Saturday
THE PRAYER OF VIGILANCE

Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James, and Salome ... came to the tomb.
Mark 16:1-2

The women went to the tomb, thinking that they would anoint the dead body of Jesus. Today we join these women and go to the tomb, knowing that our spiritual journey is not to anoint a dead body, but to stand in vigil and wait for an Easter moment. We go to the tomb remembering how Jesus waited to be raised from the dead and that the glorious moment of Easter followed this wait. At the tomb, we see the symbol of our own spirit: the parts of ourselves that have died and need to be raised to life. Like Jesus, we, too, must await new life to happen for us.

Prayer

Sit in an enclosed room with the door shut, shades or curtains drawn, and no light. Be entombed for a while. (You might even want to lie down on the floor to get more of the feeling of being on the slab of the burial stone.) Do nothing. Try to experience waiting. Then, listen to God calling to whatever is dead in you. Let God call this part of you back to life.

Easter Sunday
I AM COMING FORTH!

I stand before this moment
with silent, rising sun
and page-full of Scripture
and I proclaim: *I am coming forth!*

This is the season of my Savior,
the One whom God has raised from the dead.
This is the moment of resurrection
and I know it is the right time.

For I am coming forth,
coming forth from the tomb—
and just like my God risen,
I feel bonded with the world,
I feel all brokenness brought unto one.

I'm on my way to bless bread
with each of my dear friends;
I'm on my way to offer presence
to all those I meet on the road;
I'm on my way to bring resurrection
to all who need God's healing Life.

It is Easter
and I proclaim:
I've been raised from the dead!
I am coming forth from the tomb!

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