

A LENTEN JOURNEY

Come back to me with all your heart. Joel: 2:12

A PRAYER FOR THE JOURNEY

Lord, open the eyes of my heart, illuminate within it places of eternal Lent where I have not permitted your Love entry. Come into those Golgothas, those broken places in me, in relationships with others, in the world around us in need of reconciliation. Open the eyes of my heart to see you in those with whom I live and work and walk, in those whose journey through Gethsemane is long. Allow me to accompany you in them. Remain with us, remind us, instill within us the quiet confidence of hope in the joy of your Resurrection.

Rebecca Ruiz from *Walking Through Lent with the Risen Christ*

AN INVITATION TO GOD'S LOVE

Lent is, I think, the answer of the human soul to the challenge and invitation of God's love. Lent is the call to turn my face from the clamour of a thousand distractions, to the Beauty in which I have my being. Lent is a return, to the heart of all that matters most, the single Matter of Christ apart from whom nothing matters at all.

A few nights ago, I went to a compline evening service. In deep shadow, amidst plain-chanted hymns to end the day, I looked to the altar where candles burned round a simple cross. Behind the altar loomed a larger than life picture of a sorrowing Christ, cross on his shoulder, clothed in brown, down on one knee as he bore the weight of the world's sin and grief. Kneeling there in the candlelit darkness, with the hymns almost whispered in a tender, gentle awe, I was aware of Christ's givenness. Of the love poured without stint or measure. Of the grace that is with me now, regardless of what I offer. I did not need to give, because all Love was already given to me. All that was needed was my joy in the fact. Lent is, I think, the nourishment of joy. It's the honing of sight, the hushing of mind, so that Love can make his presence potently known.

Sarah Clarkson from *Lenten Splendor* sarahclarkson.com

BELOVED

*And as he was coming up out of the water,
he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit,
like a dove, descending on him.*

*And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son,
the Beloved; my favour rests on you."*

Mark 1:10

When Jesus went into the desert, he went with the baptismal waters of the Jordan still clinging to him, and with the name *Beloved* ringing in his ears. How else to enter into the forty-day place that lay ahead of him? How else to cross into the wilderness where he would have no food, no community, nothing that was familiar to him – and, to top it off, would have to wrestle with the devil? How else, but to go into that landscape with the knowledge of his own name: *Beloved*.

In this first week of Lent, we would do well to have that name echoing in our own ears – to enter into this season with the knowledge that we, too, are the beloved of God.

As we cross with Christ into the landscape of Lent and into the mystery that lies ahead of us, may we know at least this about ourselves: that our name, too, is *Beloved*.

Jan Richardson from *The Painted Prayerbook*
janrichardson.com

BELOVED IS WHERE WE BEGIN

If you would enter
into the wilderness,
do not begin
without a blessing.

Do not leave
without hearing
who you are:
Beloved,
named by the One
who has travelled this path
before you.

Do not go
without letting it echo
in your ears,
and if you find
it is hard
to let it into your heart,
do not despair.
That is what
this journey is for.

I cannot promise
this blessing will free you
from danger,
from fear,
from hunger
or thirst,
from the scorching
of sun
or the fall
of the night.

But I can tell you
that on this path
there will be help.

I can tell you
that on this way
there will be rest.

I can tell you
that you will know
the strange graces
that come to our aid
only on a road
such as this,
that fly to meet us
bearing comfort
and strength,
that come alongside us
for no other cause
than to lean themselves
toward our ear
and with their
curious insistence
whisper our name:

*Beloved.
Beloved.
Beloved.*

Jan Richardson
from *Circle of Grace: A Book
of Blessings for the Seasons*
janrichardson.com

PILGRIMAGE

God sent his Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that through him the world might be saved. **John 3: 17**

FINDING STILLNESS AND PRESENCE

I walked some of the Camino to Santiago a few years ago. I found it to be such a powerfully moving and spiritually beneficial experience that I have undertaken a long pilgrimage walk every year since. There is something about walking 'the way' to Santiago that appeals to all sorts of people: 'religious' or agnostic; young or old; single or married. In fact, the idea of making a pilgrimage walk is gaining in popularity. Ancient paths to Canterbury, Walsingham, Lindisfarne, and other holy places, are being trod more and more.

Our culture, it seems, is tapping into significant aspects of our Christian traditions and history: the value of the journey, as well as the destination; the value of slowing down, looking and listening; learning from the rhythms of nature; learning from the movement of one's own body; from the formation of community along the way and from times of stillness and rest.

One of the things I love about walking long distances is that it forces me to slow down. It helps me to be still and to practice being fully present to each particular moment.

When I walked to Santiago, I covered up to 18 miles (30 km) each day. That's about six hours of walking each day, with additional time spent stopping, looking and being – in local villages, in churches, in nature, in conversation, in sharing meals and in sitting and being still.

Of course, if I had had access to a car, a train, a bus or even a bike, I could have covered 18 miles in no time at all, leaving my whole day 'free' to do other things. But then I would have missed the beauty of the way and the lessons it gave.

So often we rush through life at breakneck speed, never pausing to reflect and be still. By slowing down, and being more present to each moment, all sorts of lessons are learned.

For some people, this might involve the healing of painful memories. For others, it could be time to discern the next stage in life. For many, it is a chance to really get away and listen to God. For me, it is an invitation to a whole way of being – one that recognizes that God is not 'out there' to be sought, but already 'in here' to be found.

Annie O'Connor from an article for *Catholic Charismatic Renewal*

PRAYER

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going.
I do not see the road ahead of me.
I cannot know for certain where it will end.
Nor do I really know myself,
and the fact that I think I am following your will
does not mean that I am actually doing so.

But I believe that the desire to please you
does in fact please you.
And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.
I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.
And I know that, if I do this, you will lead me
by the right road, though I may know nothing about it.

Therefore I will trust you always though I may seem
to be lost and in the shadow of death.
I will not fear, for you are ever with me,
and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

Thomas Merton from *Thoughts in Solitude* merton.org

SURRENDERING TO GOD'S LOVE

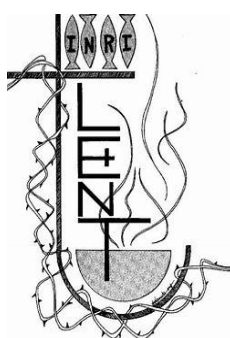
To return to God means to return to God with all that I am
and all that I have. I cannot return to God with just half of
my being.

It is going to be a very long road. Every time I pray, I feel
the struggle. It is the struggle of letting God be the God of
my whole being. It is the struggle to trust that true
freedom lies hidden in total surrender to God's love.

Following Jesus is the way to enter into the struggle and
find true freedom. The way is the way of the cross, and
true freedom is the freedom found in the victory over
death. Jesus' total obedience to his Father led him to the
cross, and through the cross to a life no longer subject to
the competitive games of this world. Jesus held on to
nothing; there was nothing left for him to cling to.

Only when I surrender myself completely to God's love
can I expect to be free from endless distractions, ready to
hear the voice of love, and able to recognize my own
unique call.

Henri Nouwen from *The Road to Daybreak*
henrinouwen.org



WISE DISCERNMENT

In our pilgrimage through Lent, the
path keeps inviting us to
practice discernment, to enter into
the sorting and sifting that lie at the
heart of this word and this season. I
pray for courage to make wise
choices that draw me deeper into the
divine.

Jan Richardson from *The Painted Prayerbook* janrichardson.com

HOLY WEEK

I exult for joy in the Lord, my soul rejoices in my God. Isaiah 61:10

REFLECTION FOR MONDAY OF HOLY WEEK

Today is one of those days that remind me how much the path through Lent resembles the path through Advent. Waiting, preparation, anticipation; the invitation to live both in the now and the not yet; the call to recognize God in the present even as we yearn for a time when God will appear in fullness and bring healing to all creation: these themes that draw us into the season of Christ's birth draw us also into this season in which we enter into the story of his death and resurrection.

For now, we wait. With hope. With longing. With a patience that is not passive but that enables us to perceive where God may be calling us to act for the healing of the world.

Jan Richardson from *The Painted Prayerbook* janrichardson.com

READING THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

No one is rejected and crucified for preaching a privatised, beautiful spirituality which is just to do with personal commitment. If it has no context in the social order, if it isn't laying bare the blatant injustice within the political order, then by and large, the powers that be love to have you around. There's nothing that political powers like more than religious enthusiasts who invite people into a purely private spirituality because that keeps them safe, keeps them from being troublemakers and makes them lovely people. But I don't think that's what Jesus was on about.

Fr Tom Cullinan 3prophets.co.uk

A JOY BEYOND REASON

In this season in which we prepare our hearts to receive the risen Christ, may you be given the grace to stand in the light of a beauty that speaks a joy beyond reason. Redemption, happy endings, resurrections, are entirely beyond explanation. We can only receive them, as we receive new life at the hand of a Creator who is always kindling light in darkness. In this dark and difficult world, may you have the grace today to believe the promise of beauty, to believe it in the face of despair.

Sarah Clarkson from *Beauty* sarahclarkson.com

SELF-SACRIFICING LOVE

By dying on the cross, Jesus surrendered himself into the hands of the Father, taking upon himself and in himself, with self-sacrificing love, the physical, moral and spiritual wounds of all humanity. By embracing the wood of the cross, Jesus embraced the nakedness, the hunger and thirst, the loneliness, pain and death of men and women of all times.

We are called to serve the Crucified Jesus in all those who are marginalized, in those who are disadvantaged, in those who hunger and thirst, in the naked and imprisoned, the sick and unemployed, in those who are persecuted, refugees and migrants. There we find our God; there we touch the Lord.

Pope Francis World Youth Day Krakow 2016

MARY

You dreamed like all mothers do.
Until he began to speak aloud,
Your boy,
calling for justice in the market place,
Demanding integrity and fair play
in the courts and halls of business.
Declaring the Realm of God
Imminent,
Manifest . . .

Jesus leapt into the swelling crowds
like an axe into wood,
Uncompromising and unrelenting
in his passionate call
for peace and justice.

Jesus, your boy,
causing havoc in public,
critiquing and condemning
the status quo,
breaking rule after rule . . .

And with every speech,
with every act of defiance,
with every call to liberation,
with every amazing deed,
Your dreams of peace and liberation,
Your dreams of a secure old age,
Your dreams of grandchildren —
Evaporated.

Edwina Gateley, an extract from the poem *Mary* taken from *Soul Sisters: Women in Scripture Speak to Women Today*

BLESSING FOR HOLY MONDAY

May the path that Christ walks
to bring justice upon the earth,
to bring light to those who sit in darkness,
to bring out those who live in bondage,
to bring new things to all creation:
may this path run through our life.
May we be the road Christ takes.

Jan Richardson from *The Painted Prayerbook* janrichardson.com



HOLY WEEK: THE EASTER TRIDUUM

Contemplation is nothing else but a secret, peaceful and loving infusion of God, which, if admitted, will set the soul on fire with the Spirit of love – St John of the Cross

THE PERFECT LOVE OF GOD

Jesus calls us to continue his mission of revealing the perfect love of God in this world. He calls us to total self-giving. He wants our love to be as full, as radical, as complete as his own. He wants us to touch the places in each other that most need washing.

Henri Nouwen from *The Road to Daybreak* henrinouwen.org

GUESTS AT THE TABLE

To be guests at the table of the one who washes our feet and disappears into bread and wine is surely to be guests on this earth of a God who calls us into the real story he is creating. We shall only know this in a real way if we learn to tread lightly on the earth and realize our communion with the dispossessed.

Fr Tom Cullinan 3prophets.co.uk

THE CROSS IS NOT THE FINAL WORD

We call the crucifixion of Jesus the passion, and so it is, for us as well as for him. Each time we stretch out our arms in love to one another, every time we open our hearts, we find the shadow of the cross, but also a glimpse of the open tomb. Jesus' final word from the cross, "Into your hands I commend my spirit," reminds us that every relationship will, at some point, contain a good-bye.

Yet we who know the rest of the story, we who have glimpsed the other side of Good Friday, know that Jesus' last word from the cross is not the final word. There are more words to come, crucial words that Christ will yet add to our vocabulary, our story, our community. For now, we wait. Together.

Jan Richardson from *The Painted Prayerbook* janrichardson.com

CHRIST IS RISEN!

The critics and the haters were all wrong. Those who sought to slander and degrade Jesus were wrong as he is indeed risen! Two thousand years later, the resurrection offers us a message of hope. Despite criticism, attacks, humiliation, and even execution, hope still prevails! It is a clear and obvious reminder that despite the horrors of the cross, a glorious resurrection awaits for those who love the Lord.

In our world today, hope seems to be so elusive. Hope seems rare in the many war-torn portions of our globe. Hope seems fleeting in communities where stark poverty is prevalent and futures seem so dark. Hope can seem non-existent for so many young people who have been neglected by unjust educational systems. Hope seems scarce in communities divided by political ideologies while human suffering abounds. Hope is all the condemned inmates can cling to as they languish on death rows all over the world.

But at Easter we are reminded once again of the power of God to deliver us as Jesus was delivered. May the power of hope fill our days!

Ralph McCloud an extract from *Pax Christi USA Easter Reflection 2025*

PRAYER

Watch now, dear Lord,
with those who wake
or watch or weep tonight;
and give your angels charge
over those who sleep.

Tend your wounded ones,
O Christ;
rest your weary ones,
bless your dying ones,
soothe your suffering ones,
shield your joyous ones
and all for your love's sake.
Amen.

St Augustine

EASTER POEM

Behold the man,
Who in frailty walks,
Towards his cross shaped throne.
Arms outstretched,
Love enfleshed,
To welcome sinners home.

Behold the man,
Whose healing hands,
Were once nailed to cursed tree,
Hope restoring,
Grace declaring,
To set the shackled free.

Behold the man,
Whose beaten body,
Was laid in garden grave,
Death defeated
Hell retreating,
Humanity to save.

Behold the man,
Whose silent corpse,
Was raised to reign as King.
Love embracing,
Joy empowering,
For him the saints will sing.

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