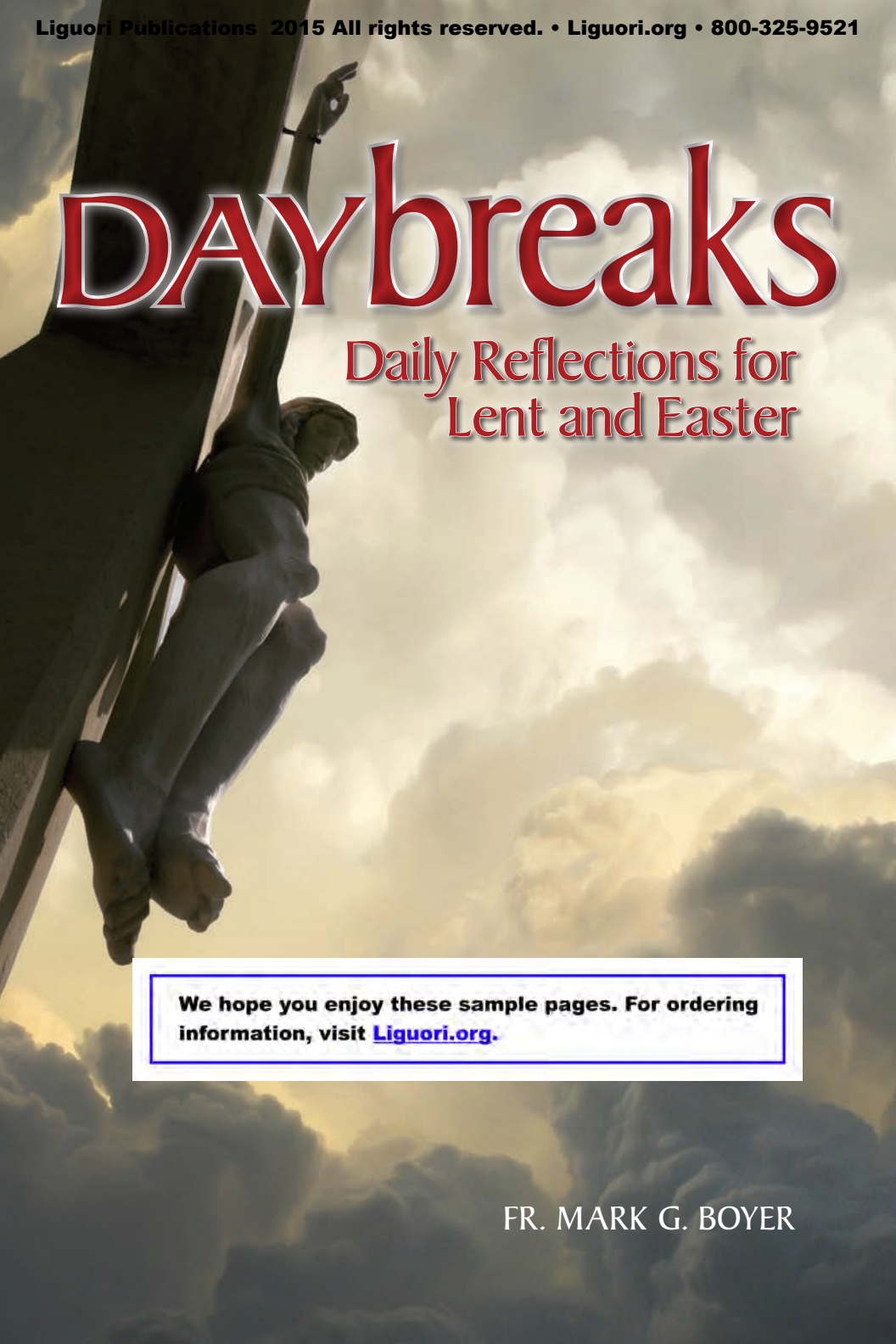




DAYbreaks

Daily Reflections for
Lent and Easter

We hope you enjoy these sample pages. For ordering information, visit Liguori.org.

FR. MARK G. BOYER



INTRODUCTION

The theme of this issue of *Daybreaks* is “people and things of Lent and Easter.” For our eight-week journey together through this season, we will focus on the many people and things that fill the fifty-four days of Lent and Easter.

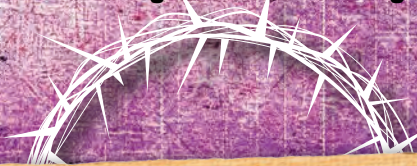
For each week, a prayer is provided that is meant to be used before or after reading the day’s reflection. Each day begins with a title featuring the name of a person, people, an object, or things meant to serve as an image to use throughout the day.

The people or things emerge from the biblical texts assigned as readings for each day of Lent and Easter. Where appropriate, words or verses have been incorporated from the Scripture texts into the reflection. The texts from the Bible serve as a nest for the egg you will hatch from the warmth of the prayer and the stirring of your spirit through the reflection.

I pray that your spirituality will be enriched through your use of this booklet.

ASH WEDNESDAY TO SATURDAY LENTEN PRAYER

God of mercy, you call me to repentance through prayer, fasting, and acts of charity during the holy season of Lent. Guide me with your Holy Spirit to deeper prayer, strengthen my will to fast, and motivate me to assist others in need. You live and reign with my Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen.



ASH WEDNESDAY

Ashes

If you have a fireplace, you have ashes to shovel, unless you have gas logs in your fireplace. Ashes remain, naturally, after burning wood, pellets, or corn. Ashes, more aptly named cremains, are what remain after a body is cremated. With a puff of wind, ashes blow away. Thus, we are reminded on the first day of Lent that we are ashes. And that puts us in our place.

The ashes smeared on our heads are meant to remind us that one day every one of us will die and be buried or cremated. In either case, we will become ashes, and that is about the only trace of our existence that will be left on this planet. Think of the millions of people who have lived, died, and been buried or cremated. What remains of them are only ashes, if that!

Not only do ashes get us in contact with our finiteness, but they remind us of our need to repent, to reorient ourselves toward God, who is able to give us life despite our ashen state. The prophet Joel records God issuing the call: "...Return to me with your whole heart..." (2:12). Paul tells the Corinthians that "now is a very acceptable time" (2 Corinthians 6:2). Lent is a season of grace; the ashes traced on your forehead today indicate that you are beginning to turn away from everything that is not God as his grace draws you to himself.



...[R]eturn to me with your whole heart, with fasting, weeping, and mourning. Rend your hearts, not your garments and return to the LORD, your God.

JOEL 2:12-13

THURSDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY

Tree

Once we have been reoriented by ashes, we begin to grow where we are replanted. That is why the image of us being a tree is appropriate for this second day of Lent. Psalm 1:3 declares that one who finds delight in the ways of the Lord “is like a tree planted near streams of water, that yields its fruit in season; Its leaves never wither.”

If you’ve ever planted or transplanted a tree, you know it is important to be sure that the tree has good roots and is planted in soil that gets plenty of rain. The Book of Deuteronomy states that people also need a certain kind of “water” to grow. Deuteronomy calls this water “loving the LORD, your God, and walking in his ways, and keeping his commandments, statutes and ordinances” (30:16). In short, growing in God’s presence is a lifestyle. The purpose of embracing it is to discipline oneself for growth.

This lifestyle produces the fruit of a healthy and holy life. It bears blessings on its branches, such as prayer, fasting, and almsgiving in myriad ways. When any kind of adversity comes, its leaves do not wither because it thrives on God’s instruction. When you see a tree today, think about your Lenten replanting and what you are using for growth.



[He who delights in the law of the Lord] is like a tree planted near streams of water, that yields its fruit in season; Its leaves never wither.

PSALM 1:3



FRIDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY

Fish

When most people think of fasting during Lent—more appropriately named abstaining from meat—they think of fish. In fact, on most Catholic calendars a little purple fish is printed on the Fridays of Lent to indicate that the whole Church is engaging in fasting and abstinence this day. These twin disciplines are designed to foster a concern for a greater good in us. By fasting and abstaining from some food, we are able to take what we have not spent on food and share with others. In other words, fasting and abstaining lead to almsgiving.



The prophet Isaiah makes this clear when he portrays God asking the house of Jacob: “Is this not, rather, the fast that I choose: releasing those bound unjustly, untying the thongs of the yoke; Setting free the oppressed, breaking off every yoke? Is it not sharing your bread with the hungry, bringing the afflicted and the homeless into your house; Clothing the naked when you see them, and not turning your back on your own flesh?” (58:6-7).

The purpose of fasting and abstaining is for the greater good of others, especially those who cannot find justice; who cannot find freedom because race, creed, or social status forms a “glass ceiling” they cannot break; who are homeless because the economy has taken away their jobs. The fish reminds us that fasting is not for our good but for the common good of those around us.

Is this what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD?

ISAIAH 58:5

SATURDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY

Stethoscope

You have seen a stethoscope hanging around the neck of your doctor, physician's assistant, or nurse. Most people equate the stethoscope with listening to the beating of the heart, even though the instrument can be used to detect and study other sounds produced in the body. On this fourth day of Lent, the image of a stethoscope illustrates Jesus as the divine physician.

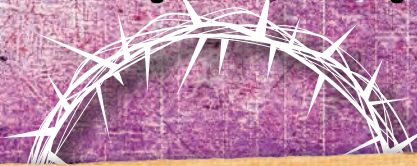
In Luke's Gospel, Jesus tells the Pharisees and their scribes, who are complaining to his disciples that their master eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners: "Those who are healthy do not need a physician, but the sick do" (5:31). In other words, if everything is OK between you and God, then you don't need a diagnosis. If, however, everything is not OK between you and God, then Jesus, as the divine physician, calls to repentance all who are classified as tax collectors and sinners—and that means everyone.

During Lent, we have the opportunity to make an appointment with and see the divine physician, who can diagnose our diseases. Isaiah names some of those Lenten diseases, such as "the accusing finger, and malicious speech" (58:9) "trampling the Sabbath" (58:13). If we are sick with any of those illnesses, then the divine physician can heal us of betrayal, gossip, and the pursuit of our own interests on God's holy day. He will place his "stethoscope" on our heart to hear what sounds emanate from deep within us.

Those who are healthy do not need a physician, but the sick do.

LUKE 5:31





FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

Heart

What a wonderful coincidence that this first Sunday of Lent is also Valentine's Day! Everywhere you will find red hearts, signifying love, which are very appropriate for the beginning of the first full week of Lent.



Saint Paul takes the lead, declaring to the Romans, "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (10:9). The apostle continues by writing, "For one believes with the heart and so is justified..." (10:10). When Paul uses the word "heart," he is referring to the whole person, everything that makes one who he or she is. For Paul, what the heart (the whole person) believes, the lips profess. That is, words express the salvation one has received.

Let the red heart remind you of the Lenten theme to rend the heart, to tear open whatever tempts you—bread, glory, power—so that your trust in God may be the faith that you proclaim in word and deed.

If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

ROMANS 10:9

FIRST WEEK OF LENT PRAYER

Only you probe the depths of the human heart, O Lord, and open it to your love and grace. During this Lent, reveal to me what is stored in my heart. Through prayer, fasting, and charity, open me to repentance as I follow in the footsteps of your Son, Jesus Christ, who is Lord forever and ever. Amen.



MONDAY FIRST WEEK OF LENT

Two Tablets

Cecil B. DeMille's famous film starring Charlton Heston as Moses is titled *The Ten Commandments*. It features a scene in which Moses goes to the top of a mountain and the bright-light finger of God carves the Ten Commandments onto two tablets of stone, which are given to Moses to take down the mountain and give to the Israelites he has led out of Egyptian slavery. What few people know is that the commandments are only ten of 613 precepts—248 commands about what is to be done and 365 prohibitions as to what is to be avoided!

Because we live in a culture that is based on law, we should be able to understand that the purpose of commandments is to outline a way of life that enables people to live together in harmony. However, many people spend their time trying to find ways around the law or the commandments instead of using them as a guide for life.

In the Book of Leviticus, God speaks to Moses, telling him to tell the Israelites, "Be holy, for I, the LORD your God, am holy" (19:2). Holiness is manifest by separation; God chose a nation to be his people, that is, he separated them from all others. Holiness is also manifest by a moral and ethical lifestyle. In other words, holiness is the degree of a person's relationship with God. And the role of commandments is to foster or grow holiness into human wholeness in God's presence, especially during Lent.



Be holy, for I, the LORD your God, am holy.

LEVITICUS 19:2

TUESDAY FIRST WEEK OF LENT

Praying Hands

Praying hands appear printed on cards, sculpted in marble, molded in plastic. Praying hands are a sign of prayer, and prayer is one of the focuses of our Lenten observance. We should not be interested in more prayer during Lent but focused on quality prayer during Lent. Many people think that prayer is something they do; however, prayer is what God does in us.

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus addresses this last issue very clearly, telling his disciples that when they are praying, they should not "babble like the pagans," thinking that "they will be heard because of their many words." Jesus says that their Father "knows what [they] need before [they] ask him" (6:7-8). Then Jesus teaches his followers the simple prayer that has come to be known as the Lord's Prayer or the Our Father.

During Lent, the praying hands should remind us to stop telling God what he needs to do and to listen to God telling us what we need to do. This repentance, of course, will require a change in us from talking to listening. The Lord tells Isaiah that the word that goes out from his mouth "shall not return to me empty, but shall do what pleases me, achieving the end for which I sent it" (55:11). So instead of saying prayers during Lent, we might begin to listen to what God is praying in us. Once we hear, we then will do God's will.

In praying, do not babble like the pagans, who think that they will be heard because of their many words.

MATTHEW 6:7





WEDNESDAY FIRST WEEK OF LENT

Burlap

Burlap is a coarse, heavy, plain-woven fabric usually made of jute or hemp and used to make bags and wrappings. About fifty years ago, potatoes, hominy, dried beans, and other foodstuffs came in burlap bags. Furniture and other household items were often wrapped in burlap to keep them from being scuffed.

In the Bible, burlap is known as sackcloth. People wear it to demonstrate repentance. For example, the reluctant prophet Jonah finally ends up in Nineveh, preaching reform. The people of Nineveh believed God; “they proclaimed a fast and all of them, great and small, put on sackcloth” (3:5). Even the king “covered himself with sackcloth” (3:6). The Jonah humor comes through when the king decrees that “[m]an and beast alike must be covered with sackcloth” (3:8).

The story is full of irony. The people of Israel and Judah do not respond to their prophets who call them to change their way of life. However, their enemies do! And not just their human enemies, for even the animals put on sackcloth! Even God changes his mind about the calamity he said he would bring upon the Ninevites!

Jesus declares that just as Jonah was a sign of repentance to the Ninevites, “so will the Son of Man be to this generation” (Luke 11:30). In other words, if people repented after listening to Jonah, how much more should they change after listening to Jesus, who is “greater than Jonah” (Luke 11:32). It’s time to put on some burlap!

[T]he people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast and all of them, great and small, put on sackcloth.

JONAH 3:5



Black ashes. Abram's offering. A wayward son.
Prayers of a Pharisee. A spilling of perfume.
The white lamb.

God uses everyone and everything to bring us closer to him.
These particular people and things emerge from Scripture.
Reflect on them this Lent and Easter with *Daybreaks*.

Your guide for the journey, Fr. Mark G. Boyer, combines
prayers, daily reflections, and daily Scripture passages into
a booklet that will sustain and strengthen your faith.

Fr. Mark G. Boyer, a priest in the Diocese of Springfield-
Cape Girardeau, Missouri, is the author of forty books
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Fr. Boyer dedicates this issue of *Daybreaks* to
Connor Allwood, Chase Anderson, and Zach Dumas.

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