

WELCOME

Introduction

Due to great luck (and providence) I fell into detention ministry about six years ago. I find myself going into places where I would not have pictured myself, and I know I am there only by the grace of God. As with any ministry, my husband and I gain far more than we give from the time we spend with these incarcerated men.

When you are doing time, it seems that it is always Lent—a prolonged period of reflection on past transgressions, patterns, and dead ends. Then

*I trust in the steadfast love
of God forever and ever.*

PSALM 52:8

*To err is human, to forgive
divine.*

ALEXANDER POPE
(1688–1744)

you plan ways to do better, to make restitution for wrongs you have committed, to make a fresh start on a path with more light.

What we Catholics do during Lent is similar to what an inmate who truly wants to rehabilitate does at all times, regardless of the time of year. Key to the success of these endeavors is a sense of

forgiveness. If we cannot forgive, if we believe that we cannot be forgiven, we will not grow. We will not change. We will not reach our God-given potential.

Imagine as our Lenten theme, then, forgiveness—both as catalyst and as redemption.

Daily Prayer

Forgive us, God of love, God of mercy,
When we stray, when we fear, when we fail,
When we betray you and deny you and crucify you.
Forgive us, God of compassion, God of healing,
And teach us to forgive as you do
As we emerge from the midnight tomb
And turn our faces to the Easter dawn.

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ASH WEDNESDAY

Turn Away From Sin



Two admonitions are commonly said today when we come forward and our foreheads are crossed with ash: “Turn away from sin and be faithful to the gospel,” or “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you will return.” When distributing ashes to Catholics in the prison chapel, I prefer to say the first. These men are reminded daily that they are dust. Or dirt. Or scumbags. An encouragement to turn away from sin seems a healthier place to start a Lenten journey.

Embracing the gospel is an enormous undertaking for anyone. It means embracing joy, pain, change, and uncertainty on the path to spiritual growth. It means turning away from fear, self-loathing, and guilt—all byproducts of our sin. By embracing the gospel, we pull Jesus into our hearts and invite him to stay.

During the Lenten season, we seek to turn away from that which destroys us. We fall into the arms of what makes us creatures of love. We need to open ourselves to growing closer to God and distance ourselves from past hindrances. We need to prepare ourselves to greet something different, something positive, something that enlivens our souls.



Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing.

JOEL 2:13

THURSDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY

Love and Forgiveness

Love is the soil that allows
true forgiveness to take root.

True forgiveness walks hand in hand with love. To be able to forgive, we must be able to love—ourselves, others, and God. While this seems so simple as to go without saying, I find that it bears repeating again and again. When love has fled from our hearts and from our actions, it is impossible to offer forgiveness to ourselves or to anyone else. Without love, forgiveness is a hollow gesture, a recitation of words without substance. Love is the soil that allows true forgiveness to take root.

“Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us,” we pray. And while we often say this prayer by rote, we must behave in a way that makes the prayer meaningful. If the Our Father is to make any sense at all, we must actually forgive those who trespass against us, and ask forgiveness of those whom we have hurt. We must believe—deeply and passionately—in a God who forgives. We must trust in a God who extends the possibility of redemption to everyone—no matter how long the rap sheet, no matter how unforgivable the crime, no matter how unreachable the heart. To a God who is love, not one of us is unlovable.



Those who say, “I love God,” and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen.

1 JOHN 4:20

FRIDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY

Here We Are

We, too, do not always put the
here and now to good use.

In the first of two biblical books that bear his name, young Samuel hears God calling him, but does not realize it is God. Believing it is the voice of his teacher, Eli, he runs to his teacher and answers, “Here I am.” Eli finally tells him to answer the Lord’s call: “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.” And God then speaks to Samuel, telling him of the plans he has for Israel. I am intrigued by the young man who, when called, promptly answers, “Here I am.” My own children often answered, “Hold on, Mom.” Don’t we sometimes tell God to hold on, to wait until later to speak?

Being *here* now is an essential concept to grasp. Some inmates take to heart the here-and-now opportunity of confinement to figure out who they are, and to discern the will of God in their lives. Others do not take this step, and only seem to mark off the days until their parole. We, too, do not always put the here and now to good use. We bide our time, looking for ways to distract ourselves from the real issues at hand. We do not see with clear eyes what God has clearly placed before us. The present tense escapes us.

Yet, it is the time we spend in God’s sight—here and now, stripped of all plans and excuses—that teaches us to make every moment count.



Speak, for your servant is listening.

SAMUEL 3:10

SATURDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY

Giving Up or Letting Go

What do we need to let go of in order
to abandon ourselves to God's will?

Traditionally, we “give something up” for Lent. The process of giving something up is the middle component of the Lenten triad of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. The point, of course, is to give up something that we will really miss, to suffer in our sacrifice—even though it is a much paler version of the degree to which Jesus suffered.

But in prison, what is there to give up when the experience of confinement already demands that inmates do without some things? Does giving something up in an atmosphere of enforced giving up hold as much meaning as it does for those on the other side of the prison walls?

But at one Criminals & Gangmembers Anonymous (CGA) meeting at the prison, we decided during one particular Lenten season that we would try something different: instead of giving something up, we would try to let something go. What do we need to let go of in order to abandon ourselves to God's will? Is it an addiction, an attitude, a fear, a prejudice? When we let go of those things that prevent us from entering into a close friendship with God, we will be truly reborn. When we turn to God and let God in, we allow him to transform our lives according to his loving plan.



Then I turned to the Lord God, to seek an answer by prayer and supplication with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.

DANIEL 9:3

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

Turning the Other Cheek... With Difficulty

**A current stronger than electricity
surges through our souls when we forgive.**

To be forgiven is a fundamental human need. In the Our Father, we seek forgiveness immediately after we ask for “our daily bread.” Perhaps forgiveness is bread for the soul.

We must be open to the grace that comes from the seemingly meek act of “turning the other cheek”—even if the qualities of mercy and compassion seem to belong more to the divine than to us flawed mortals. From the cross on Golgotha, Jesus prayed for mercy for his executioners, saying, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). We marvel at how Jesus was able to “turn the other cheek,” but we are not so good at following his example. By turning the other cheek, we get better at letting go of the things we think we can never forgive.

We often are taken aback by the feeling of power that accompanies the act of truly forgiving someone. A current stronger than electricity surges through our souls when we forgive. Such selflessness gives us a tiny glimpse of the essence of the divine, and we feel nourished.



I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also.

MATTHEW 5:38

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the spirit while we do some deep soul-searching. We examine our personal sinfulness in hopes of turning away from temptation, and turning toward God's will. Lent can be likened to spiritual rehab. It is a time for us to take stock of our lives, and to get with God's program—one day at a time."

In this *Daybreaks for Lent and Easter*, Valerie Schultz focuses scripture selections, reflection, and prayers centering around forgiveness and redemption drawn from her ministry as a prison chaplain. With these meditations, Schultz walks the reader through steps that challenge the spirit, bringing forgiveness and discovery of the true meaning of salvation.

Valerie Schultz's first book, *Closer*, a collection of essays on marriage and intimacy, was published in 2008. Her work has appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and in numerous Catholic and parenting publications. Valerie and her husband, Randy, are detention-ministry volunteers.



All inmates' names have been changed, and they are no longer at this facility.

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