

INTRODUCTION



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PAM HUMMEL-SHEIM

Plant the Seed

I was making a retreat a few years ago when the priest directing me suggested I memorize and repeat this prayer several times a day:

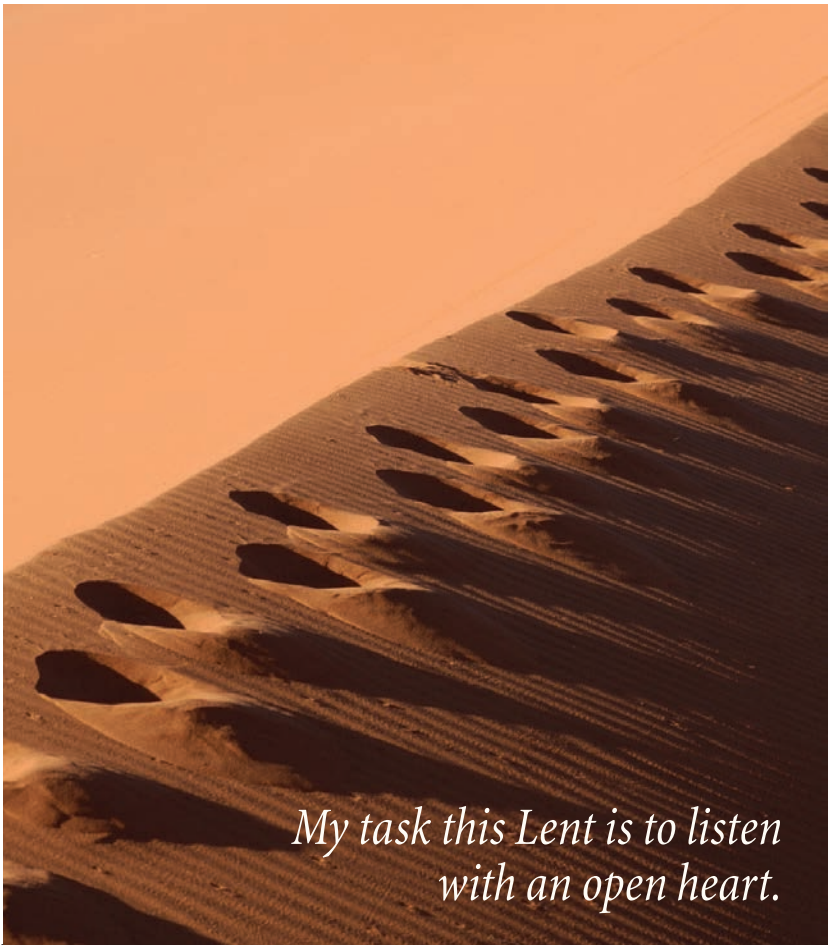
*Spirit of God, who dwells in all creation,
I allow you to love me without reservation.*

Repeating this prayer was a powerful exercise. Eventually my mind was no longer saying words; my spirit was opening to God. Plant this seed in your own heart as you walk through these days of Lent and Easter.



Walking Through Lent

I think about Jesus going out to the desert for forty days and forty nights. The Lenten desert. And I wonder if I can also make a desert journey of these coming days and nights. I won't be able to leave the demands of my world, or be spared any of my responsibilities. I will have to listen to desert questions right in the midst of the city. Can I be that intentional?



*My task this Lent is to listen
with an open heart.*

INDEX OPEN

ASH WEDNESDAY

As a test I leave work at noon to walk in the park, stopping to listen to the birds. Their song brings unexpected tears. I clear away stones and branches and rub dirt between my fingers. It is moist, this dust to which I will return. Even so, it reminds me of the fleetingness of everything. It reminds me that a light burns within and that I am charged with protecting that light. Through every difficulty, within each circumstance, this fire burns. Nothing harms me or tempts me apart from this presence. I let the fragrance of the trees penetrate my senses. In this quiet I know that I actually need very little, and want very little. This is what the desert is saying.

For these Lenten days I will allow the Spirit to raise questions and issues that are important for my journey. My task, to remain vigilant to everything I see. To listen. Just that would be enough if I could do it. To listen with an open heart to the Spirit within.



Allowing the Spirit to Guide Us



We were following the route taken by Paul through Greece and Turkey. Every morning the group of twenty-five listened to the guide's itinerary for our day. I appreciated his sense of organization. But once the journey unfolded, it began to make less and less sense to me. Some mornings we covered a hundred miles, traveling east. Yet the very next morning we might travel two-hundred miles west, retracing our steps. This became a pattern. Finally I asked our guide why we were traveling in such an inefficient manner. He shrugged. "We're following the journey of Paul, exactly as he made it."

That felt even more confusing. Paul was traveling on foot. He would have thought things through. You would never add hundreds of miles to your journey by walking back and forth. You wouldn't backtrack. You would be careful. I expressed my bewilderment. The leader smiled. "You're thinking logically," he said. He emphasized that Paul would sometimes reach a town and realize he had left the previous village too hastily. Perhaps they still needed instruction. Or he might be hundreds of miles into the journey when he felt a call to return to the first church on his path. Remarkably, he listened. So the resulting zigzag pattern was the look of a journey led by the Spirit. I thought about my own life...my need for control, my goals. And beyond these, the possibility of a guidance from within that would be my eyes, and lead me.

Am I listening to the Spirit?

The Freedom of Our Deepest Self



I was a junior in high school, student of a beloved English teacher who was fair, but tough. If Mrs. Allen gave a good grade you knew you had earned it. She did not grade out of kindness, nor did she reward “potential.” One weekend she asked our class to write a paper from the point of view of the King of England who had abdicated his throne for love.

A week later she walked between the rows putting the graded essays face down on each desk. As she laid my paper in front of me she paused and said, “Your essay made me cry.” It wasn’t much. Five words. I know I am a writer today because of that moment. I knew that her evaluation meant something.

In some respect we are always hoping for someone to see not only our talents, but our deepest self and the power it embodies. There are so many polite “no’s” and “yes’s” in our lives. In many ways we avoid the heart of things, and shy from what lies beneath the surface. Lending our lives to a deeper meaning and the emergence of truth is very different. It demands vigilance and commitment. It may involve choices that set us apart.

This is what’s required to be “born again in spirit.” From the heart of all things the Greater Soul asks us to pull our boats up on the beach, nets and all. Put those things aside. Follow me.

*Am I avoiding the heart of things,
the deeper meaning of truth?*

When Love Leads the Way



The entrance to the Massachusetts State Prison for women was in full view. It was a spring evening, the moon full. I walked slowly toward the prison entrance wishing I had never accepted the chaplain's invitation to address a gathering of inmates. I grew acutely aware that the credentials I normally relied on—my license as a therapist, academic degrees, books I've written—would carry no weight here.

For more than fifteen years I'd led retreats and seminars. Those were comfortable settings. Now this new audience. What could I offer women largely illiterate, angry, despairing? I walked in with only a desire to help them find their way beyond hardship, and the story of how I had transformed my own pain.

That evening initiated me into the world of prisons—a world of deep longings and of broken hearts. A world of women taught by their life experience that they didn't matter. But not until I was inside the prison, confronted with faces and hearts, did I see how to reach them.

Life seems to follow this pattern: the journey unfolds as we live it out. My part is to let go with both hands and take the first step. The first step sets everything in motion. I think of Paul's journey through Greece and Turkey. Over a thousand miles on foot, searching for fertile hearts. Start walking, the Spirit demands. You're not alone. Love will lead the way.

Take the first step. You are not alone.

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

Come, Follow Me

Beside me is a glass of ice water. I'm sitting in a beach chair, but sitting inside, on a carpet, looking through a window at a maple tree. It's the magical morning hour when sunlight showers the tree's yellow leaves, then reaches further, its long arm entering my room, to create streaks and triangles across the floor. Tight slivers of light shaped by the window blinds shimmer and dance in front of me.

There is nothing else in my writing room but me, the beach chair, a sleeping bag, a thesaurus, the glass of water, and these patterns of light. But it is enough. Factoring in the tree and the light, it is more than enough.

I take periodic breaks from my work to read Joyce Rupp's account of her walk along the Camino road that stretches across Spain to the coast. The road winds under the Milky Way Galaxy toward Compostela, which means, literally, field of stars. For six weeks my friend walked with only a pack on her back and the openness in her heart.

In Louisiana I stood alongside hurricane evacuees who had only the shirts on their back. This same theme returns again and again to my life: we really need so little. Each day the spirit beckons. Will you come and follow me? Everything else is distraction from that outstretched hand.



Paula D'Arcy's poignant reflections for this issue of *Daybreaks* will touch your heart in a way that can only move you closer to God. She explores the themes of love, fear, pain, and promise in ways that will move you emotionally, guide you spiritually, and make this Lent and Easter season a rewarding journey.

Begin your day with a *Daybreaks* meditation. Find a quiet, peaceful place. The reflections will only take a few moments, but allow time for the message to unfold in your heart. As it does, consider how these ideas impact your life, think about ways you can change your attitudes and beliefs, and hear the words, Come, follow me.



PAULA D'ARCY is an internationally known retreat leader and conference and seminar speaker. Her ministry grew out of tragedy. In 1975 her husband and twenty-one-month-old daughter were killed by a drunken driver. Paula survived the accident and gave birth to another daughter six months later. Paula is the author of several books, including these titles published by Crossroad Publishing Company: *When People Grieve: Overcoming Pain Through Love*; *Gift of the Red Bird: The Story*

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