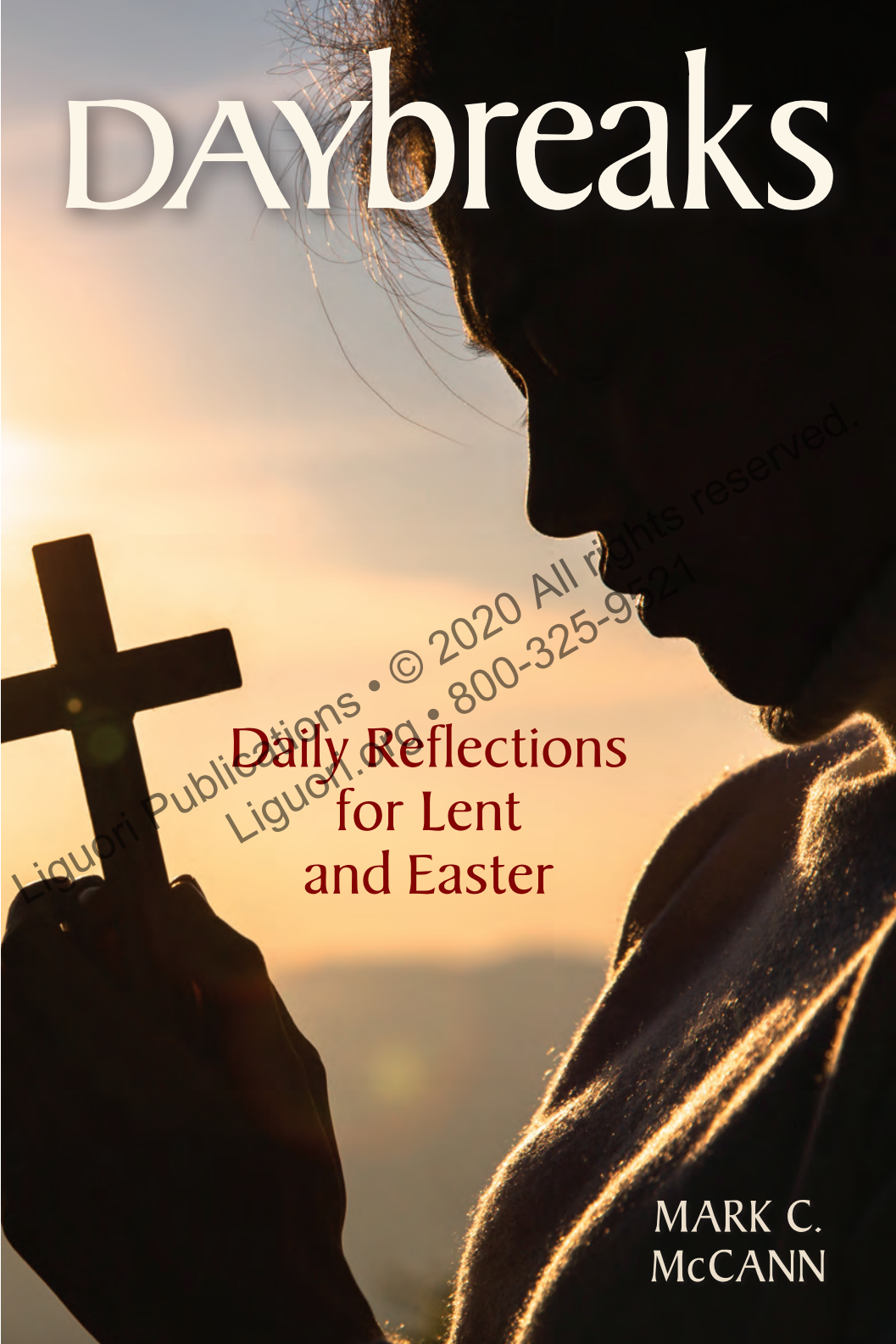


DAYbreaks

A silhouette of a person's head and shoulders in profile, facing right. They are holding a large wooden cross in their right hand. The background is a bright, hazy sunset or sunrise, with the sun low on the horizon, creating a strong backlight effect. The person's hair is visible at the top, and the cross is a simple, dark silhouette.

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Daily Reflections
for Lent
and Easter

MARK C.
McCANN

Introduction

The Lonely Journey of Joy

For the sake of the joy that lay before him he endured the cross, despising its shame, and has taken his seat at the right of the throne of God.

HEBREWS 12:2B

Alonging lives in the depths of the human heart, an emptiness that can only be filled by the One who died for sinners. It calls those who believe to walk a lonely journey through the wilderness of our searching souls from darkness to light. Lent is a holy fast, our solitary days of self-denial, the time of testing that draws us with joy to Calvary's tree where we surrender our lives to Jesus, who surrendered his life for us.

The beauty of the resurrection can only be understood in the shadow of the cross. In losing our lives, we discover that our earthly pilgrimage finds its meaning only in Christ.

As we make our way through the meditations of this Lenten devotional, let us cast aside our sense of self and become lost in the transformation of our spiritual surrender and self-giving. Let us walk willingly with our Savior to the place where justice and mercy meet, and salvation breaks forth like the dawn on Easter morning.

MARK C. MCCANN



JAVIER CRUZ ACOSTA / SHUTTERSTOCK

A Lenten Prayer



God of the wilderness, Lord of the fast,
may we walk each day of our Lenten journey
fixing our eyes on the cross.

May we surrender all that we are so that we may
become all that we are in you.

This I pray in Jesus' name, amen!

DAYbreaks

Imprimi Potest: Stephen T. Reinauer, CSSR, Provincial, Denver Province, the Redemptorists

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Trading Sorrow for Salvation

Return to me with your whole heart,
with fasting, weeping, and mourning.

JOEL 2:12B

It is scary to surrender control of our lives to anyone or anything. We prideful creatures can be reluctant to see our need for a Savior because we believe that giving ourselves to him means giving up who we are. We would rather handle our problems with determination—struggling through our sorrows with clenched fists raised to heaven in indignation—than admit we are powerless before God.

And yet Lent begins with a surrender. With the sign of our salvation etched on our foreheads, we are called to remember that we are but dust and ash, made of this earth, and still God loves us. He proved this infinite love by sending his Son to take on flesh and heap upon himself the sins of humanity. This perfect sacrifice breaks the shell of our hardened hearts, leading us to take the first step on a narrow path through the wilderness, where our selfish sins lay bare and our sorrow overwhelms us until his love turns it all to joy.

While our Lenten journey is personal, we remain connected to our brothers and sisters in Christ through the cross and his eternal once-for-all sacrifice. In the quiet of the confessional, our repentance brings relief and restoration. At the table of the Lord, the Eucharist unites us with the moment when humanity and heaven are reconciled forever. In this holy season, with the sign of our frailty and hope upon our heads, we know we are forever held in the perfect love of God.

Lord of our salvation, may we walk this desert way of hope knowing that your Son came from heaven to walk this world and transform our lives. In Jesus' name I pray, amen!

From Death to Life

Then he said to all, "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."

LUKE 9:23

Lent is a time of meditation and action. We must decide where our hearts lie and commit to the way of righteousness every day of our lives. Those who walk the wicked path are eventually brought to a standstill in the company of sinners and take their rest in a place of unbelief. But those who follow the way of Christ sink their roots deep into the fertile soil of their salvation, bearing fruit even in the dark days.

The path to the Promised Land goes through Golgotha. There is no crown without the cross, no heaven's joy without earth's sorrow. It is a daily journey in a world often weary with sin and brokenness. A world where believers face rejection and persecution. It is a journey of life, for in Christ, we are empowered to choose the way of our redemption. Though our Lord faced unfathomable agony as he carried the weight of all our burdens and sin, his joy was never in any way diminished. He remained ever jubilant in his desire to fulfill his Father's will.

Let us choose this day whom we will serve. May the journey of Lent strip us of our sorrow and fill us with the delight of our salvation in Christ.

Father, may I never be ashamed of the cross and my call to follow you daily. May I choose life in Christ over the emptiness of this world as I take up my cross for you. I ask this in Jesus' name, amen!

An Acceptable Fast

My sacrifice, O God, is a contrite spirit;
a contrite, humbled heart, O God, you will not scorn.

PSALM 51:19

The beauty of our Lenten journey lies in its call to withdraw from our daily pursuits of pleasure, possessions, and power so we may learn the mystery of an acceptable fast. Many give up something for Lent but do little else to immerse themselves in the joyful surrender the season brings. We are guests at the wedding feast of the Bridegroom, who has walked the road of sorrow so he can ready his Bride for the day of their union. We celebrate because we join our Savior in the sweet surrender of conversion.

When we allow ourselves to be broken by the love of God, our sin becomes so distasteful and our sorrow so overwhelming that we fall into the arms of the One who has removed our unholy wages at the cross. Unbound by such a weighty burden, we turn to those in the prison of their trespasses and suffering, break their yoke of misery, and lead them to the Father who fills their deepest longings with his perfect love.

The true fasting of our Lenten journey opens our eyes to the unlimited mercy of God and frees us to live out the virtues of faith, hope, and love, knowing the light of our vindication shines upon our lives.

Father of mercy, may this walk of self-denial show me the beauty of the acceptable fast and raise me up to serve this broken world, pouring out the love of Christ into others' lives. In Jesus' name, amen!

Healing for Our Sickness of Soul

[Jesus said,] “Those who are healthy do not need a physician, but the sick do. I have not come to call the righteous to repentance but sinners.”

LUKE 5:31–32

For those caught in the grip of addiction, admitting their struggle is the first step toward healing. For those who are steeped in the sickness of their sin, it is in emptying ourselves that we come to be filled. The remedy for our soul affliction is a life centered on service and devotion to God. When we call out to God to save us, cease from oppressing the weak, and strive to care for the suffering around us, the light of our righteousness shines forth and we become fruitful bearers of the Good News.

What an awesome gift we have received! Jesus did not wait until we “cleaned up our act” before lavishing his love upon us. No, our Savior searched with merciful eyes for those willing to receive the grace he offered and gently called them to come to the Great Physician of their souls. Then he strengthened their frail frames and poured out his abundant blessings into their lives. The result was a celebration of praise, an experience of deep satisfaction, and an inheritance of eternal joy.

Lent is a journey of healing, a time of divine treatment for our deepest sickness of soul. May we allow the Savior to cure the illness of Adam’s sin and our present selfishness so we may celebrate in joy.

Father of love, your Son is the cure for our addiction to selfishness and sin. May I receive the healing balm of his love. In Jesus’ name, amen!



Through the Desert to the Cross

Filled with the holy Spirit, Jesus returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert.

LUKE 4:1-13

How wondrous it is that the One who left the mansions of heaven to enter the depths of the earth should plunge himself into the waters of the Jordan and be guided by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil and go forward to the sinless life that led to the cross. Jesus became our sacrament of salvation, a living parable of our journey from the desert of sin to the empty tomb of resurrection morn. What man was incapable of achieving, the sinless Son of God accomplished in his perfect love. He did not shy away from the temptation and suffering of life but took it all upon himself so we could be freed from our fall.

Luke's order of temptations differs from Matthew's in order to show the sacrificial purpose for which the Son of Man came. He would reject the offer of unholy food, spurn any lust for earthly position or power, and accept the great fall he was to undergo. No evil could touch the Savior who had come to rescue the world from sin.

As we walk our own desert journey through the season of Lent, may our lives become a living testimony of the grace that has saved us from damnation.

Almighty God, thank you for sending your Son to walk from the desert to the cross. May I endure the temptation to stray from my time of testing and walk the road to Calvary in love. In Jesus' name, amen!



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