

**‘Man is born to live, not to prepare for life.’**

Boris Pasternak in his novel *Doctor Zhivago*

**‘Man fully alive is the Glory of God.’**

St Irenaeus (second century AD)

# Contents

About the author	6
Introduction	7
Ash Wednesday and the Days Following Preparation Days	17
The First Week of Lent Turning and Returning	31
The Second Week of Lent Old Testament Visionaries	55
The Third Week of Lent Arising with Jesus	81
The Fourth Week of Lent Paul and the Resurrection	107
The Fifth Week of Lent The Epistles and Newness of Life	133
Holy Week The Saving Acts of Christ	159
Easter Week The Resurrection Events	187

## Introduction

Lent is meant to be a time of preparation and adventure and an entering into newness of life. It is a time of joy for it is a looking forward to Easter and the resurrection of our Lord. From the beginning Lent has been a time of turning and returning. In Lent the catechumens, who were being prepared for baptism at Easter, would be asked, ‘Do you renounce sin?’ and ‘Do you turn to Christ?’ It is a time of turning away from the darkness of sin and death and turning to Christ who is our light and our life. It soon became associated with penitence for sin and a time for amendment of life. In this way, it looked at pruning and cutting away anything that hampered good growth and fruitful lives. Along with the catechumens those who had been excommunicated for sinful acts would come in penitence and the promise to walk in newness of life to be welcomed back at Easter. In this way for all of them Lent is a homecoming to God: like all homecomings it is a time for celebration. In Lent we turn to forgiveness of God and rejoice that he accepts us into his presence with joy. We come to celebrate that we *are* inheritors of the kingdom of heaven.

In the northern hemisphere Lent comes at the time of year when the days are lengthening. It is thought that the word ‘Lent’ has the same root as lengthening. It is a time when that which lay dormant in earth begins to arise: when days of light conquer long nights of darkness. It is also a time for weeding out that which prevents the growth of the things we desire to grow and of pruning to encourage healthy growth. If plants are allowed to run rampant they tend to degenerate, becoming distorted and disfigured. Even weeding and

pruning are full of promise. Lent is to be when our vision is lengthened and new life is allowed to spring forth in us as we turn to him who is the light. If we make Lent a time of misery we make a mockery of what our faith is about. If we make it only a time of giving up a few things we enjoy, it is not likely to bear new fruit. We need to see Lent not so much as a time for giving things up but a time to take on that which enhances our lives. We only seek to give up things that are keeping us from living in the fullness of the presence and love of our God. I like the words of St Paulinus of Nola writing in the fifth century:

Think you the bargain's hard to have exchanged  
the transient for the eternal, to have sold earth to  
buy heaven.

For me this captures the spirit of Lent for it is the time of newness of life and learning to walk in the presence of our eternal God: it is not a negative time but a very positive one. You may like to devise a Rule for the Forty Days of Lent and make sure it is a rule that brings you closer to God and to others. Lent is a time for change: a change of direction, a change of awareness, a change of attitude and a change of heart.

To help in this I would like to offer you a Scripture reading for each day to encourage you to take time to focus on the presence and life-giving power of our God. The passages I have chosen are to help you towards being aware that the power for the resurrection is always at work in our lives. Easter is not one day but for every day of our lives. The texts have been chosen to centre our thoughts on letting the God of life and the risen Lord be at work in us.

The days from Ash Wednesday to the first Sunday in Lent,  
I have used as preparation days.  
Each of the Sundays in Lent has a psalm to meditate on.

The First Week of Lent is about turning and returning and is based on the story of the Prodigal Son.

The Second Week of Lent is concerned with Old Testament visionaries, looking in hope and faith.

The Third Week of Lent is about people arising through the power of Jesus.

The Fourth Week of Lent looks at 1 Corinthians 15: St Paul's great chapter on the resurrection.

The Fifth Week of Lent looks at texts from the Epistles and newness of life.

Holy Week views the saving acts of Christ leading to his death and burial.

Easter Week rejoices in the resurrection events and the risen Lord.

The method I have used for these meditations is one I have personally used for years and is known as *Lectio Divina*, which means 'Divine Reading'. It must be emphasised that *Lectio Divina* is not Bible study, good and as important as that may be; rather, it is allowing the reading of the Scriptures to touch the heart: it is seeking to let God speak to us. Neither is this reading the speed-reading which we are all used to in reading the newspapers or a novel or even the Bible. It has been described as reading 'with the eyes and ears of the heart' or as 'reading the holy'. It is not gathering information but rather seeking to deepen our awareness of and our relationship with God. It is to be still enough and open enough to hear the echo of God in our lives. This reading is not about covering the ground but rather reaching into the depths and allowing the mystery of the presence to enfold us. This is why it begins and ends in affirming that God is with us and ends resting in his presence and love.

*Lectio Divina* is divided into five parts, which you are meant to travel through, though there is always the option to

stay with one part or to go backwards and forwards as you so desire. If God suddenly speaks through a word or a phrase it would be foolish to move on to another part. Do not let the words get in the way of the living Word. Our God is more important than any words on these pages. When you become aware of him abide there. Too often in life we allow our agendas to crowd out our awareness of the presence of God. It is important to us that throughout we make our attendance on God our priority. It is necessary that you fix a regular time and place each day for Divine Reading and be committed to it. There is a great danger of not continuing in this way of meditation if we do not give it some priority and make sure we have the time and a place to 'come into his presence'. To deny ourselves this is to deprive ourselves of what we need for our well-being and the fullness of joy. Though this is more prayer than study it will enrich our studies and in turn our studies will often be enriched by it. I would like to offer you this pattern for Lent, Easter and beyond. I cannot emphasise enough the need for a regular fixed place and time for prayer and meditation. I believe we all need a special holy place for only then do all places become holy. The pattern for Divine Reading is as follows: **Realise, Read, Ruminare, Respond, Rest.**

### *Realise*

Realise you are in the presence of God. Be still and know. Call upon him. Sit quietly in his presence. Ask for his guidance. Often at this point there is a request to the Holy Spirit for guidance in our reading of the Scriptures. You may like to use the following prayer as part of your focusing on what you are doing:

Lord, make me aware of you  
 in the reading of the Scriptures,  
 in the listening to your word.  
 Open my eyes to your presence.  
 Open my mind to your guidance.  
 Open my heart to your love.  
 Open my life to your will.  
 Lord, increase my faith in you:  
 and show me how to live to your glory.

Or you may like simply to ask:

Lord, let the words I read,  
 resound on my lips,  
 re-echo in my thoughts,  
 reverberate in my heart  
 and revive my whole being.

Then a time of silence is of great importance. Too much talk or reading often prevents our being aware of God. We need time to come before our God who is ever with us. Awareness of this reality is of the utmost importance. Use this period, like the final one, to relax: make sure you are sitting comfortably. Let go of all tension of your body and mind. Breathe gently and deeply. Affirm that God is with you and enjoy being in his presence. You may like to use words to stop your mind wandering. If so, affirm gently, 'The Lord is here: his Spirit is with us.' If troubles beset you say, 'The Lord is at hand, be anxious for nothing.' But, as much as possible, just wait upon God in the stillness, relaxing in his presence.

### *Read*

Read the passage chosen for the day. Remember this reading is not so much to inform the mind as to move the heart. It is

sad if we do not allow the word of God to touch our whole being. Take your time and let the words resonate. The amount of reading is not as important as the depths the words find within you. So the passage need not necessarily be long, sometimes a verse will do; after a while, even a single word will do. Do not rush past words; rather let them sink deeply into your being and do not let other thoughts or events crowd them out. Give them your full attention; set your heart upon them.

Whenever possible read the passage aloud, for then you are using more of yourself and letting the words vibrate from you and within you. Let the words be read slowly and then carefully consider if a single word or phrase seeks to communicate something to you. If it does, stay with it and do not move on.

The passage of Scripture has been printed in full for each week. However, it is good to use a Bible and become familiar with where the various books are in relationship to each other.

### *Ruminate*

Many of the early saints suggested we chew over the words. Too often the words are rushed so that we can get on with the next part of the course, whatever it is. Chew over the words and extract the goodness from them and digest them. Before you begin this you may like to pray the ancient prayer:

Blessed Lord, who has caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ.

As you chew over the story or words, be aware that they are a way of God feeding you, of God reaching out to you. What is God saying to you? Where do you see yourself in this situation? What images does it create? Bring each of your senses into play. Are there things you can see, touch, hear and smell? Could you see yourself in this situation and reacting to it? Remember you are ruminating, take your time. This part of the Divine Reading is called meditation. The Hebrew word for 'to meditate' is '*Hagah*' and it means to whisper softly or to recite until the words enter into your heart. This is not so much memorising as letting the words enter deep into your life. If your mind wants to wander, bring it back with the key words or statements from the passage and recite them. Do remember this is not studying the words but rather seeking to allow God to speak to you. You may like to say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'

Within this section I have provided more information about the text for those who feel they would like to know more about how the text arose and the meaning of some of the phrases. However, it is important not to be diverted from allowing the words of Scripture to speak directly to us and so descend into a study mode rather than one of listening to God. Use the words I have provided in this section only to help you have a clearer vision of what is being said or asked; there is no need for them if the Word of God is speaking to you.

### *Respond*

Respond to what you have just experienced. Respond towards God in prayer and thanksgiving. This part of the Divine Reading is called '*Oratio*', prayer; therefore it is important that you communicate how you feel to God. Let

your heart reach out to his heart. I often think on the words of Julian of Norwich when she says of God and his purpose for us, 'love is his meaning'. You are not here to communicate new-found wisdom but to speak to and acknowledge the ever-present God who created you and continues to love you. For this reason it is important that the first part – if not the greater part – of response is to God.

Now see how you can respond towards your neighbour, the world, yourself. What do the words you have heard suggest that you do? Remember parables of Jesus were told not for study but for an immediate reaction. If we do not respond immediately it is likely we will not respond at all. When the heart is moved by God we should react to its vibrations.

Prayer most often leads to action. Not only do we say, 'Your will be done', we have to seek to do God's will. We are called to be the instruments or channels of God's love and peace. God works his purpose of love out through us and our relationships with each other and the world. For this reason the respond section has two parts: a silent part where we speak and listen to God and then a part in which we turn towards others, thinking what we might be asked to do. Both these sections demand our undivided attention.

### *Rest*

Though we are always in the presence of God, we do not always acknowledge it and are often unaware of it. We can be distracted from God's presence by many things, even reading the Scriptures. This is why I sometimes use the phrase 'come into the presence'. Make it a priority to turn to God and his love, to focus on the reality that God is always there in your life. So, after the hard work and concentration of each session, make sure you have some time to enjoy what you

have experienced and to relax and enjoy the presence of God. Turn to the ever-present God and rejoice in him. Like lovers there is no need for words: rest in his power, his peace and his love. This can be compared to sunbathing; lie back in the presence and just enjoy being there. Wallow in the reality that you are in the heart of God and that God is in your heart. Quietly rejoice in the fact that we dwell in him and he in us. Let the rhythm of your breathing be a reminder that you are in God and God is in you. When distractions come, do not worry; simply return to God by calling upon him in love. As you come to the end of this rest, seek to come away gently from it and to take it with you for the day ahead. Allow this time to be an uplifting time, a time when you experience that your heart is on fire with his love. As you move out, seek to share that love with those that you encounter this day. God's peace go with you.

# The First Week of Lent

## *Turning and Returning*

### **First Sunday in Lent**

#### *Realise*

No matter how dark the day or stormy life is, God is your strength and your salvation. You are not alone and not left totally in the dark, for God is with you and is your light. God cares for you and does not want you to perish. Affirm the reality that God is the deliverer from fear and death and put your trust in him. You may like to say this whole prayer or pick out a line to affirm each time your mind wanders from God's loving presence:

Lord God, in you I trust, for you are Almighty.  
You are a loving God, a forgiving God.  
You, God, are my Maker and my Redeemer.  
You, God, are my strength and my hope.  
You, God, are the light in my darkness.  
You, God, are the safe haven in the storm.  
You, God, never leave me nor forsake me.  
In you, God, I trust.

#### *Read*

You who live in the shelter of the Most High,  
who abide under the shadow of the Almighty,  
will say to the Lord, 'My refuge and my fortress;  
my God, in whom I trust . . .  
Because you have made the Lord your refuge,  
the Most High your dwelling-place,  
no evil shall befall you,  
no scourge shall come near your tent.

For he will command his angels concerning you  
to guard you in all your ways.  
On their hands they will bear you up,  
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.  
You will tread on the lion and the adder,  
the young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot.  
Those who love me, I will deliver;  
I will protect those who love my name.  
When they call to me, I will answer them;  
I will be with them in trouble,  
I will rescue them and honour them.  
With long life will I satisfy them,  
and show them my salvation. (Psalm 91:1, 2, 9-16)

*Ruminate*

This psalm has been used in the Night Prayers, Compline, of many churches and monasteries. The Jewish Prayer Book suggests this is a psalm to use before 'retiring to rest'. Image after image offers us an entry into a deeper awareness of God's presence and power. 'You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide under the shadow of the Almighty,' is a reminder of God's presence and that we dwell in him and under his protection. The word 'abide' means to reside in, as you do in your home. The psalmist wants you to make your home in God and with God. Do you make your home with God and is God at home in your home? Seek ways you can improve your personal relationship with God by often turning to him during the day. The shelter of God protects us from all evil, even in the most horrendous situations. It was with this thought that the Hebridean fishermen could go out into one of the most dangerous seas in the world and

say: 'What can befall you and God the Father with you? No harm can befall you.'

They were sure that God was their safe haven and their fortress. Dwell on these images of God and his protection. Do you have an image that speaks to you of God's care and protection for you? If you have, dwell on that for a while; if not, use one from this psalm or find an image that is meaningful to you.

There is the amazing promise that if we dwell in God nothing can harm us. St Paul affirms this when he says nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus (see Romans 8:37-39). The psalm lists all sorts of things that can destroy us and does not say we will escape them but that they will not overcome us. In the final result 'victory is ours, through him who loves us.' God says, 'Those who love me I will deliver; I will protect those who love my name. When they call to me I will answer them.' The word for 'love' here is about one who 'clings' to God, even who 'hugs' him in love. This is a wonderful description of faith, for it describes a living and loving relationship with God rather than a set of formal beliefs. Do you see your relationship with God on this level? It is love that God asks of you. Those who love God are promised an eightfold blessing. Look at the words and think on each part of the blessing, staying with what is most precious to you: 'I will deliver, I will protect, I will answer them, I will be with them in trouble, I will rescue them and honour them, with long life will I satisfy them, and show them my salvation.' For us the 'long life' is that which is eternal and God's salvation is revealed in Jesus Christ.

*Respond*

Rejoice that God is a protecting and loving God. Whatever your situation, God does not forsake you. You might like to commit your friends and loved ones to his saving love, especially any who are in danger or trouble at this time.

Look at where you put your trust, where you look for security and protection. Is your main trust in health and in your finances? Is it in insurances and protection plans? Do you live as if you are self-sufficient in any way, or do you hedge yourself about with all sorts of aids to well-being and strength? Check and see how much of your trust you put in God and in his salvation. Let the Almighty One be a strength to you, and let his love and presence help to dispel your fears. Put your trust in God today and in his love and mercy. Rejoice that God hears you and is a present help in any troubles.

*Rest*

Rest in God, who is your fortress and your strength: let go of all your troubles for the Almighty cares for you. Be still and rejoice in his abiding love. If your mind wanders or before you leave, you may like to affirm:

In heav'nly love abiding,  
no change my heart shall fear;  
and safe is such confiding,  
for nothing changes here.  
The storms may roar about me,  
my heart may low be laid,  
but God is all around me,  
and can I be dismayed? (Anna Laetitia Waring 1820–1910)

## First Monday in Lent

### *Realise*

Every day you are in the presence of God, he enfolds you in his love. All that you have comes from him. In him is your well-being and your peace. He has invited you to abide in him; let him abide in you. Seek to be aware of this and pray:

Father, as I rejoice in the gift of life,  
 in the dawning of this day,  
 open my eyes to your presence;  
 open my ears to your call;  
 and set my heart on fire with love for you.  
 Father, let me abide in you and not wander from your presence.

### *Read*

Then Jesus said, ‘There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, “Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.” So he divided the property between them.’ (Luke 15:11, 12)

### *Ruminate*

Here is a typical young man wanting to stretch himself, but he seems unaware of where he is well off. There is a sense that he is not at home in his own home; he feels he needs to go somewhere else. This is natural, but if the discontent is in ourselves we will take it to wherever we go. Under Jewish law the father was not allowed to do what he liked with the property. The elder son would inherit the larger proportion, two-thirds; the younger son would inherit the remaining third (Deuteronomy 21:17). The father could proportion the property out before he died, but each son had an obligation to look after it. The younger son is almost saying