



Introduction to Lenten Prayer Services

Lent calls us to change, to begin anew, to grow in our communication with God. This Lent may be like no other, due to the pandemic, which has changed life as we know it in so many ways. Perhaps we will have even more time for prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Perhaps the darkness in our world due to the recent events of last month, the attack on our democracy, have weighed heavy on our hearts. And yet, Lent brings springtime, light, repentance, redemption, and the opportunity to look forward. There is hope on the horizon. A young woman of 22, a poet laureate graced us with her vision of "A Hill to Climb." Her words were powerful and, for me, truly inspiring.

When I was thinking about these six prayer services for Lent this year, I wondered what I could offer that might speak to your heart. I prayed for insight on a path forward and a format that I could use that just might help us all during our journey of Lent. You will notice that the format is the same for all six prayer services, but each one has a different "food for thought" excerpt from Joan Chittister, OSB, and her Lent 2021 pamphlet. She is one to make you think! I then went looking for an appropriate psalm to pray, using the Nan Merrill translations. I concluded by sharing with you a "providence reflection" by one of our own providence people and a couple of reflection questions to consider. I hope that you will enjoy using these prayers for your private or communal prayer times and that they speak a message to your heart.

Lent calls us to change, to live anew, and to be better disciples of Jesus. The season of Lent leads us to the Light of Christ and the path to resurrection goes through the cross. I think Amanda Gorman's poem and her ending words could also be applied to our Lent-to-Easter Journey.

"The new dawn blooms as we free it.
For there is always light, if only
we're brave enough to see it,
If only we're brave enough to be it."

Happy Lent and Happy Easter!

Sister Barbara





Ash Wednesday

Call to Prayer

Leader: Together let us celebrate God's love

All: and proclaim God's faithfulness!

Leader: Dependent upon God whose Spirit liberates us

All: Let us together give glory.

Food for Thought: Joan Chittister, OSB

The Scripture for the opening of Lent (Joel 2:13), takes us back to a time of great danger in Israel. ...The very life of the population is in question. The prophet Joel, convinced that they people have brought the disaster upon themselves by virtue of their unfaithfulness, summons the House of Israel to repent. But interestingly enough, he does not call them to attend penance services in the synagogue. He does not require them to make animal sacrifices in the temple. He does not talk about public displays of remorse, the time-honored tearing of garments to demonstrate grief. No, he says instead, "Rend your hearts and not your clothing." Lent is about becoming, doing and changing whatever it is that is blocking the fullness of life in us right now. Lent is a summons to live anew.

Psalm Antiphon: Rend your hearts and not your clothing.

Psalm 1: Psalms for Praying—Nan Merrill

Blessed are those who walk hand in hand with goodness, who stand beside virtue, who sit in the seat of truth; for their delight is in the Spirit of Love, and in Love's heart they dwell day and night.

They are like trees planted by streams of water, that yield fruit in due season,
and their leaves flourish; and in all that they do, they give life.

The unloving are not so; they are like dandelions which the wind blows away.
Turning from the Heart of Love they will know suffering and pain.

They will be isolated from wisdom; for Love knows the way of truth,
the way of ignorance will perish.





Ash Wednesday

Providence Reflection: Kathleen Desautels, SP

If the gospel tells us anything about Jesus' life it is that he can't be accused of the "silence that gives consent." His words and actions are clearly to bring attention to the upside down world where the Temple scribes and priests wielded the same abuse as the civic authorities. Whether it was turning over the tables, criticizing behavior and tending to the needs of the lepers, Jesus gave expression to his life of integrity, truth-telling and love. It was Providence at work. Jesus, like us, believed in what was not yet, but believed in the possibilities of what ought to be for the sake of the common good.

Reflection Questions

- ◆What "doors" of my heart do I need to open this Lent to live anew?

- ◆How might I risk speaking and acting for the common good?

Closing Prayer

Provident God, we pray for an unblocking of all that keeps us from living the fullness of life. Give us courage to risk speaking and acting for the common good. You are the God of all possibilities; pour into our hearts the life we know down deep that You desire for us. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.





Lenten Prayer Service Week One

Call to Prayer

Leader: Together let us celebrate God's love

All: and proclaim God's faithfulness!

Leader: Dependent upon God whose Spirit liberates us

All: let us together give glory.

Food for Thought: Joan Chittister, OSB

When we "rend our hearts" we break them open to things that we are refusing for some warped reason to even consider. Perhaps we've refused to put the effort into reviving old spiritual practices like visits to church, meditation in the morning, and memorizing the psalms, and have failed to substitute new practices. Maybe we've refused to repent of old abrasions, quick words, harsh judgments made in haste and expiated never. We have closed our hearts, as time went by, to so many of the things we need to live full and holy lives. Lent is the time to let life in again, to rebuild the worlds we've allowed to go sterile. If our lives are not to die from lack of nourishment, we must sacrifice the pride of the sloth or the listlessness that blocks us from beginning again.

Psalm Antiphon: Jesus went into the desert to pray.

Psalm 6: *Psalms for Praying*—Nan Merrill

O my Beloved, though I have turned from You, continue to enfold me with your love; be gracious to me, Heart of my heart, for I am sad and weary. Surround me with your healing Light, that my body, mind, and soul might heal. How long must I wait, O Love?

I open the door of my heart to You, my Beloved, enter in and imbue me with your steadfast Love. I shall remember You all my days; I shall sing praises to You throughout the nights.

I am tired of so many fears; I cry myself to sleep at night; grief and feelings of guilt bedim my eyes with tears; all my doubts, my fears, are creating walls so that I know not love.

Depart from me, you enemies of wholeness, for the Beloved is aware of my cry; Love has heard my prayer; and hastens to answer my call. Though my fears are running for cover, yet they shall be transformed by Love; all that was in darkness shall come into the Light.





Lenten Prayer Service Week One

Providence Reflection: Virginia Miller, SP

As I see Jesus this first Sunday of Lent being tempted so severely I wonder what He did to endure this struggle. For sure, I know He prayed. As I begin my Lenten journey I am tempted to look at all the negative things that are happening in our world. Violence, abuse, terrorism, a pandemic, and greed seem to be controlling our everyday existence. ...I try to think of what I can do to live more closely the call of the Gospel. ...Providence has provided, and will continue to provide, all that we need. I have to tell myself over and over “NEVER DOUBT” and believe that miracles can happen. Our Foundresses began with so little, but with much faith and prayer the vocations came, and the works flourished. Today the needs are very different, but our sisters continue to do what they can to meet the needs of our day. I tell myself NEVER DOUBT, the needs of the poor will be met. Miraculously people will come forth and carry on the charism of our communities. My prayer can make a difference.

Reflection Questions

- ◆What are the worlds that might have gone “sterile” in my life? (community life, physical health, spiritual practices, friendships, art and beauty)

- ◆Choose one to devote yourself to during this Lenten season as a way to grow into a more full human being.

Closing Prayer

Provident One, help us to breathe life into our sterile worlds again. May we come to see all people and creation as sacred, needing our compassion and understanding. May “NEVER DOUBT” become our mantra so that our trust and confidence in Divine Providence will bring about miracles for us and those for whom we pray and among whom we minister. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.





Lenten Prayer Service Week Two

Call to Prayer

Leader: Together let us celebrate God's love

All: and proclaim God's faithfulness!

Leader: Dependent upon God whose Spirit liberates us

All: let us together give glory.

Food for Thought: Joan Chittister, OSB

The story of the sacrifice of Isaac exists in Scripture to make the point that this God differs from the gods that Abraham has worshipped up to this time. This God is a loving God who does not under any circumstances demand human sacrifice, even of people accustomed to it, as the culture in which Abraham lived surely was. Abraham seemed more than willing to go along with what the society around him told him was the voice of God. It is God who, on the other hand, expects a better ear than that. Clearly, God wants a questioning obedience. God wants us to obey the higher good, even when the social norms say otherwise. God wants an obedience that arises out of the fullness of our humanity and the depths of our conscience. God wants us to cultivate a critical heart, a spiritual compass that leads to the love of God. ... Lent calls us to listen for the voice of a loving God everywhere, no matter what that may be.

Psalm Antiphon: By your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing because you have obeyed my voice.

Psalm 2: *Psalms for Praying*—Nan Merrill

Why do nations and people plot against one another, setting themselves apart and conspiring against the Beloved and those who follow Love's way? They say to themselves, "WE are free of Love's law; humility and service are for others."

The Beloved, who is ever present, can but smile at their foolishness, knowing that one day, they will fall to their knees in regret. They do not hear the Beloved's firm and steadfast voice: "I have set Love in your hearts, my dwelling place."

Let me share the way of Love: Love calls to us, "You are mine; this day I become your Beloved; ask of me what you will. I give you all nations, the whole universe to care for, to be your delight. You will shatter fear as an iron rod hitting a clay pot."

Listen then, you leaders of nations, heed well, O people of the earth. Serve the Beloved with reverence; bow your heads and embrace Love. Otherwise, ignorance and fear will be your companions bringing destruction and despair. Blessed are all who dwell in Love!





Lenten Prayer Service

Week Two

Providence Reflection: Sylvia Resha, CDP Associate

Jesus took Peter, James and John up the mountain and was transfigured before them. It must have been overwhelming to them. ...The presence of Moses and Elijah conversing with Christ, hearing the voice of God claiming Him as His Son, though probably frightening, was surely a great reassurance to them. That Gospel calls us to reflect on the mountains in our lives up which Christ leads us; dealing with our confusion in recognizing His presence and, sometimes, who He is; and our call as His disciples to "Listen to Him." We sometimes feel we have been stranded on an insurmountable "mountain" of pain, confusion, fear and doubt and never realize we have been led up that mountain to experience our own transformation in faith. Our commitment to God's providence, God's divine care and direction is ever present in our journey through the struggles and joys of life's events and situations. It sharpens our senses and make visible God's presence.

Reflection Questions

- ◆ "Clearly God wants a questioning obedience," Sr. Joan wrote.
What were you taught obedience required?

- ◆ Where do you see evidence of going along with human sacrifice in the world today?
What individually and collectively can people do to end such sacrifice?

Closing Prayer

Provident God, help us to see how we go along with human sacrifice when we vent our anger on another, when we vent our vengeance on the innocent and call it war, when we deny the poor the basics of life. Let us hear the voice of Love, your voice, and let it change us for the better. Lead us to the path of fullness of life that You desire for us.
We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.





Lenten Prayer Service Week Three

Call to Prayer

Leader: Together let us celebrate God's love

All: and proclaim God's faithfulness!

Leader: Dependent upon God whose Spirit liberates us

All: let us together give glory.

Food for Thought: Joan Chittister, OSB

We can use religion to market a lot of things. Religion is not always spiritual. It is sometimes a very material thing, more about us than God, more about personal salvation than about the salvation of the world around us. Religion can, in fact, if we're not conscious of the possibility, be just one more step on the way to our spiritual deterioration. We can use religion to "spiritualize" everything in life and protect us from facing our own struggles or those around us. We can use religion to justify a kind of spiritual masochism. We can use it for social prestige, to make the right social contacts. We can, like the money changers in the temple, make religion just one more network in our lives where we meet the right people and are seen in the right places to sell the right contracts. Lent calls us to stop using religion as an excuse for not examining our real motives for everything we do in life, including the spiritual. Lent call us to rend our hearts, attune our conscience to the voice of a loving God, and to ask ourselves, down deep, if and why we are "religious" at all.

Psalm Antiphon: He told those selling doves in the temple to stop making the house of God a marketplace.

Psalm 11: *Psalms for Praying*—Nan Merrill

In the Beloved do I make my retreat. How can you say to me, "Flee like a bird to the mountains; for lo, the unloving bend the bow, fitting their arrow to the string; they aim to destroy what is good?" If the foundations of goodness are undermined, what will remain?

The Beloved dwells in the Holy Temple, the sacred place within our hearts, loving and testing each one of us. Divine Love offers both the good and the unloving opportunities to grow, to become whole, enduring with Love those who choose the way of darkness.

Those who walk without light will know fear and doubt; ignorance will be their guide. For our Creator is just, gifting us with free will; those who walk in the Light will behold the Beloved's face.





Lenten Prayer Service

Week Three

Providence Reflection: Ruth McGoldrick, SP

When I listen deeply to another's journey or inner struggles, it evokes in me a deep compassion and a desire to be fully present in a caring, healing way. The gift of such compassionate presence is a life-long journey of learning first to be present, kind, and compassionate oneself, and to one's own inner processes, and then to be fully present to others on the way. One of the best gifts we can give and receive is the gift of listening. Listening with compassionate presence is healing and nourishing. Such presence is sacramental; it is one of the most beautiful manifestations of the mystery of God's providential caring.

Reflection Questions

- ◆ Can you give one or two examples of where you see this marketing of religion taking place in our nation, our world today?

- ◆ Ask yourself if and why you are religious at all.

Closing Prayer

Loving God, give us courage to be a voice of truth to power and to the systems it serves. Sometimes it is necessary that the Gospel unsettle us; that it touch the sin of the society in which it is being proclaimed. May we, as people of Providence, be a voice for the voiceless, for who will speak if we don't?

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.





Lenten Prayer Service Week Four

Call to Prayer

Leader: Together let us celebrate God's love

All: and proclaim God's faithfulness!

Leader: Dependent upon God whose Spirit liberates us

All: let us together give glory.

Food for Thought: Joan Chittister, OSB

The spiritual impact of the Cyrus reading (from Chronicles 36:14-16, 19-23) on this fourth Sunday of Lent becomes plain. Even strange things in life are some kind of blessing to us. And blessings often come from where we least expect them. [Haven't we all seen blessings even coming out of the pandemic time that we might not have imagined.] ... We lose one job and find ourselves launched right into the middle of a better one, but one we ourselves would never have chosen. We fail in the one arena in which we wanted to excel, and in our desperation succeed in another one. God's blessings exceed our imagination and challenge our faith. Everywhere we go, God is. But we spend years avoiding that insight. We wrench and distort our own lives because we refuse to shake off the chains that make it impossible to fly in an open sky. Lent says, open your hearts, and trust that God [Providence] is really everywhere in your life. Then life becomes the only "penance" we need, and Lent becomes the call to new life.

Psalm Antiphon: The Holy One is merciful and blesses us always.

Psalm 12: *Psalms for Praying*—Nan Merrill

Come to our aid, O Beloved! Darkness seems to pervade the earth; where is the faith, the integrity that once lived in the hearts of your people? Where is the truth, the trust that made its home in us?

O Love, cleanse us from our double talk, create in us new and single hearts, spare us from those who will think, "our speeches will win over all. Words are our weapons; no one can master us!"

"For the hearts of those who call to Me, for those who cry out for wholeness, I shall now make Myself known," says the Beloved. "I shall make myself known in their hearts."

The promises of Love are pure, like silver refined in a crucible, like gold purified seven times. Be our safeguard, O Blessed One, stay close by throughout these dark days where unloving hearts seem to abound. Come to our aid, O Beloved!





Lenten Prayer Service

Week Four

Providence Reflection: Mary Diane Langford, CDP

We are more than halfway through Lent. By now our grand plans for “improvement” have come to naught. And, of course, we haven’t “done enough!” Shall we wallow in our failures? Shall we fear the consequences once more? Or shall we go back to [this Sunday’s reading for the fourth week of Lent: Ephesians 2: 4-10] and cast ourselves on the mercy of God? The author of this letter says that this is all it will take for us to realize and accept our salvation. Let’s not wait for a “deathbed conversion”; rather let’s embrace the mercy of God every single day. Easter means that we are being saved right now—no matter how messy we are! When we live from the mentality that God’s generous, unending grace is saving us all along, the world blooms with the Providence of God!

Reflection Questions

- ◆ Have you ever blessed or been a blessing for someone? How?
Did you receive a blessing in return?

- ◆ Think about one of your own conversion experiences, gained by
“listening with the ear of your heart.”

Closing Prayer

O Blessed One, thank you for your renewed insights and blessings in my daily life. Help me always to “listen with the ear of my heart” to Your voice. Open my mind to remember and celebrate all the “conversions” that were unexpected but needed. May we all learn how to bless one another. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.





Lenten Prayer Service Week Five

Call to Prayer

Leader: Together let us celebrate God's love

All: and proclaim God's faithfulness!

Leader: Dependent upon God whose Spirit liberates us

All: let us together give glory.

Food for Thought: Joan Chittister, OSB

The fifth Sunday of Lent puts the essential summons of Lent in so many words: God is in the newness of life. It is, however, the old, the familiar, the routine, the commonplace that we prefer. So we cling. We like to be in control of our lives. We like surety and predictability. We don't want to change. We want to master the moment and capture it in chains. But the ground under us is one great mass of movement. Where is God in flux? ...God is right where we do not want God to be. God is in the newness. We begin to see differently. We begin to live differently. We begin to think about both life and ourselves differently. We find ourselves in a land we never knew existed and would not have chosen to inhabit if we could possibly have avoided it. The God the past is past now. There is only one way out and that is forward. ...Lent calls us not to get trapped in the past. Everything in life can begin again, at any time, in every way, if we will only permit it...If Lent is to be real at all, we must recognize that we are on a journey that twists and turns between what we were before and what we are becoming now. There is no settling down. There is only the call of the New Beginning where God dwells in the heart and takes all our fear, our loneliness away.

Psalm Antiphon: I will trust in the God of Surprises

Psalm: 10 *Psalms for Praying*—Nan Merrill

Awaken, O Love! You who created me, return to my side; forget me not in my weakness.

Why do I turn my back to You, and say in my heart, "You will not take notice of me?"

You do see me. Yes, you know of my anguish and fears, that You may take me once again unto yourself; when I commit myself into your hands, You are ever my strength and comforter.

Break then the webs I have woven, seek out all my fears until You find not one.
You are my Beloved for ever and ever; all that is broken within me

will be made whole. O My Beloved, You hear my deepest desires;

You will strengthen my heart, You will answer my prayer; that I might live with integrity and become a loving presence in the world!





Lenten Prayer Service

Week Five

Providence Reflection: Guadalupe Ramirez, MCDP

The readings for the fifth Sunday of Lent direct our attention to the gift of time, the work of Providence in time. “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.” Lent invites us to enter into the sacred hour of Jesus, the providential moments that glorify him, that bring life only through suffering and death on the cross. Lent invites us to turn from the darkness of evil to the light of resurrection, to new hope and vision. We live in this providential time when our strongest efforts toward relieving human misery seem like seeds so tiny that they will never bear fruit. ... Yet we also are summoned to embrace this providential moment to become evangelizers in our own land. The power of the New Covenant beating within our hearts gives us the strength to continue learning obedience through suffering that comes as we strive to bring unity in diversity, collaboration instead of coercion, and meal-sharing around the table. Here the voiceless can articulate their needs as well as their commitment to become providence by participating in the kingdom. Yes, many more times are yet coming for men and women of providence to believe that to receive true life, we must first let go, to slowly lose all that thought was life in order to receive eternal life in the already and not yet. Are we ready?

Reflection Questions

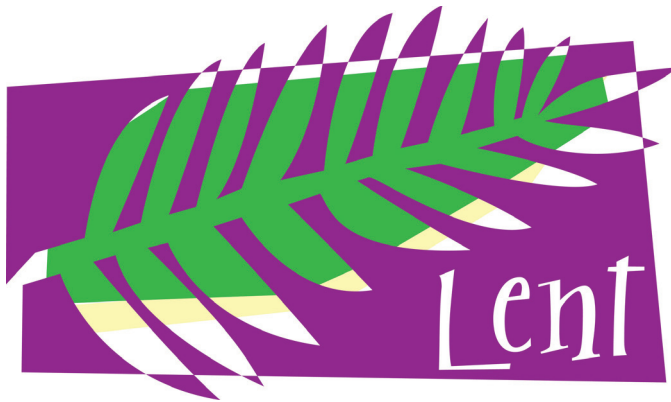
- ◆ Think of a time when you trusted in the God of Surprises and what lesson or lessons did such trusting teach you?

- ◆ In the last line of a poem, “the Layers” Stanley Kunitz writes: “I am not done with my changes.” What arises in you when you reflect on this line?

Closing Prayer

O God of Surprises, thank you for the invitation to start over, to begin again. Over and over You lead us to new pastures, new peoples, new promises, new ways of being alive to the place of the divine in the mundane. Help us to believe in the promise of Your crucified Son that all who follow and serve him will one day be where He is. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.





Lenten Prayer Service Week Six

Call to Prayer

Leader: Together let us celebrate God's love

All: and proclaim God's faithfulness!

Leader: Dependent upon God whose Spirit liberates us

All: let us together give glory.

Food for Thought: Joan Chittister, OSB

[As we celebrate Passion Sunday] Lent is an opportunity to look again at who we are, at where we're going in life, at how we're getting to where we say we want to go. Everyone needs to know that they have lived for something. Everyone has a responsibility to leave this world better than when they found it. Everyone needs to carry a light into the darkness of the world around them so that other, too, may follow and find the way. Lent ends in the shadow of an empty cross and in the sunrise of an empty tomb. There are great things to be done by us and each of them takes great effort, requires great struggle, will face great resistance. But the way to the empty tomb goes through the mount of the cross. Lent is a time to carry the crossed of the world ourselves: [the hungry, refugees, people of color, victims of white supremacy, and of human trafficking]; it is up to us to work for justice so that others can live a life of dignity and pride. Lent puts options before us. We can choose to be open or hearhearted, attuned to God or closed to everything but the self, a spiritual persons or a religious person, full of faith or drowned in despair, stagnant or full of life. Lent is a choice of directions.

Psalm Antiphon: Blessed is the One who comes in the name of our God.

Psalm 28: *Psalms for Praying*—Nan Merrill

Blessed are You, Heart of my heart for You heed the cry of my spirit. You are my strength and my protection; into your hands I commend my soul. My heart leaps as You come to my aid, and my lament becomes a song of exultation, a shout of praise to You, my Comforter!

Remember well, my friends, the Spirit of Truth becomes known to all who are receptive to Love, giving strength and shelter. Mercy and justice are our birthright—let us call on the Giver of Life to guide our feet into the way of peace, to live in our hearts forever. Blessed be the name of the Most High!





Lenten Prayer Service Week Six

Providence Reflection: Suzanna Harland, SP Associate

For most of us it is often in hindsight that we allow the Spirit to reveal the true meaning and impact of an event. A disappointment, a defeat, even death of family or friends may eventually lead us to paths and results beyond far better than what we had imagined. However, our personal Lenten sacrifices and times of reflection serve no purpose unless we are able to focus on our heart's deepest longing—unity with Christ. [We are living in unprecedented times; political upheaval in our recent past has shook our nation, a global pandemic that has left millions affected by disease, the loss of loved ones or those suffering in economic poverty—our concerns are many.] As WPC Sisters and Associates...we join with others speaking out about war, uncontrollable violence and death, prison reform, the death penalty, immigration, global health, and religious freedom. We are daring to live our charism in this evolving world. In everything that we do, the love of Christ impels us to respond to the cries of the poor and vulnerable. As we journey together through this most sacred Holy Week, let us find new and creative ways to reach out to those in need and be a voice for justice in our wounded world.

Reflection Questions

- ◆ We heard Sr. Joan say that “Lent is our time to prepare to carry the cross of the world ourselves.” Whose cross do you help carry beside your own?

- ◆ “Everyone needs to know they have lived for something.” What is it you live for?

- ◆ Reflect on one gift God has given you and how you are using it to leave the world a better place.

Closing Prayer

God of Justice, give us hearts of courage to speak out against exploitation, corruption and injustice. No age is too late to live for justice. No season of life is too late to use our gifts to bring about the reign of God. Help us continue the journey from Galilee to Jerusalem, knowing that however our efforts end, the resurrection is surely on its way. We pray in Jesus' name.

