

Catholic

UPDATE

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Your Daily Lenten Journey With Fulton Sheen

ARCHBISHOP FULTON J. SHEEN

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The word *Lent*, from the Middle English word *lenten*, means “springtime.” The Lenten season lasts forty days because Jesus went into the desert for forty days of fasting, meditation, and reflection before beginning his ministry.

The Congregation for Divine Worship describes Lent as a time of preparation for Easter. “It is a time to hear the Word of God, to convert, to prepare for and remember Baptism, to be reconciled with God and one’s neighbor, and of more frequent recourse to the ‘arms of Christian penance’: prayer, fasting and good works.”

The quotations collected in this article are from the writings of Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen. They invite us to enter the season as an active participant.

DAY 1: INVITE GOD IN

There isn’t a single soul at which God hasn’t knocked thousands of times. As the sun is always illuminating, so God is always acting on the soul. The first impetus always comes from him. He seeks us before we dream of seeking him; he knocks before we invite him in; he loves us before we respond.

Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me.

—Revelation 3:20

DAY 2: GIVE GOD YOUR HEART

God will love you, of course, even though you do not love him, but remember if you give only half your heart, he can make you only fifty percent happy. Only you have the freedom to give your heart away. To whom do you give yours?

Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart to revere your name.

—Psalm 86:11

DAY 3: PERFECT TRUST

In the order of divinity, nothing is accidental; there is never a collision of blind forces hurting us at random. Instead, there meets a divine will and a human will that has a perfect trust in ultimate good, although it may not understand how until eternity.

Every human being is, in point of fact, like a baby in the arms of his or her loving mother, who sometimes administers medicine.

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

—Romans 8:28

DAY 4: PURIFY YOUR HEART

Prayer opens possibilities. Houseplants cannot live without water; the flowers will not blossom without drink. Windows will only let in light if we clean them. Our hearts will let God in if we purify them. Blessings come to those who put themselves in an environment of love.

Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

—James 4:8

DAY 5: SHINE YOUR LIGHT

Away with mediocrity! Lift up your hearts! The world is looking for light. Will you hide yours under bushels? The earth is looking for savor; will you let the salt lose its savor?

No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house.

—Matthew 5:15

DAY 6: PRAY ALWAYS

Prayer is that which establishes contact with the divine power and opens the invisible resources of heaven. However dark the way, when we pray, temptation can never master us. The first step downward in the average soul is giving up the practice of prayer—breaking the circuit with divinity, and the proclamation of one's own self-sufficiency.

Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

—Matthew 26:41

DAY 7: CULTIVATE VIRTUE

True peace has a firm trust in God despite its own past sins; false peace shrinks from the thought of God because it will not put an end to present sins. The only way to keep evil out is to let God in. Character-building consists not in the elimination of vice but in the cultivation of virtue; not in casting out sin but in deepening love. An endeavor to expel evil without praying for the presence of God is doomed to failure. Nothing is secured without God's love spread throughout our hearts.

[Jesus said,] "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."

—John 14:27

DAY 8: HAVE HUMILITY

Humility is like an undergarment: We have to have it, but we should never show it. Pride is what we think ourselves to be; humility is the truth we know about ourselves, not in the eyes of our neighbor, but in the eyes of God.

When pride comes, then comes disgrace; but wisdom is with the humble.

—Proverbs 11:2

DAY 9: BECOME FIRE

The tragedy of this world is not so much the pain in it; the tragedy is that much of it is wasted. It is only when a log is thrown into the fire that it begins to sing. It is only when the thief was thrown into the fire of a cross that he began to find God. It is only in pain that some begin to discover where love is.

John [said], "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."

—Luke 3:16

DAY 10: UPROOT EVIL

Socrates observed that "people are afraid of letting themselves be cut and cauterized for their healing." In like manner, spiritual goodness can be feared because it will demand a painful uprooting of what is evil. Similar to how some get used to living in disorder and dread cleaning. Those who get used to sin dread confession.

The next day [John] saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

—John 1:29

DAY 11: CRUCIFY PRIDE

Belief in the resurrection of Christ does not start with the reality of an empty tomb or with the fact that dead men rise. It begins with the truth that crucified men rise up. Only those who have in some way presided over the crucifixion of their pride and selfishness know what it is to rise from the dead. They become "new creatures."

And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

—Galatians 5:24

DAY 12: GOD IS ON YOUR SIDE

God loves us despite our unworthiness. It is his love which makes us better, rather than our betterment. Often during the day, say, "God loves me, and he is on my side, by my side."

But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

—Romans 5:8

DAY 13: FOR THE LOVE OF GOD

We would all like to make our own crosses; but our Lord did not make his own cross, neither shall we. We can take whatever he gives us, and make the best of it. The typist who works on routine letters...the student in her studies, the sick in isolation and pain, the mother dressing her children: Every such task can be ennobled and spiritualized if it is done in God's name.

And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

—Colossians 3:17

DAY 14: AN ACCEPTABLE SACRIFICE

There is a world of difference between a gift and a sacrifice. A sacrifice is a gift plus the love and personality of the giver. A gift comes out of the pocketbook; a sacrifice comes from the heart.

The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

—Psalm 51:1

DAY 15: I AM POOR

So long as there are poor, I am poor. So long as there are prisons, I am a prisoner. So long as there are sick, I am weak. So long as there is ignorance, I must learn the truth. So long as there is hate, I must love. So long as there is hunger, I am famished.

[Jesus said,] "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."

—Matthew 25:40

DAY 16: COMFORT THE SORROWFUL

Help someone in distress and you will lighten your own burden. The joy of alleviating the sorrow of another is the lessening of one's own. If we dig someone out of a hole, we get out of the hole we are in.

Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

—1 Thessalonians 5:11

DAY 17: THE POWER OF HOPE

One of the beautiful effects of hope is that it relieves us of the morbid fear of failure. As pride grows less in us, therein grows relief from terror of humiliation through failure. Once God and obedience to his will become our all-encompassing desire, fear of the hostility of others completely evaporates. We are ready to be "fools for Christ."

And now, O Lord, what do I wait for? My hope is in you.

—Psalm 39:7

DAY 18: DYING TO SELF

Only by dying to our lower self can we live to the higher. By surrendering control and crushing our egotism, we develop our personality. How does the plant get its power to develop? By being unresponsive and unrelated to others or by surrendering and adjusting itself to its environment that it may survive?

Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."

—Matthew 16:24

DAY 19: A CLEAR CONSCIENCE

There is going to be a tremendous transformation of social position at the last day, for God is no respecter of persons. Our social position in the kingdom of God will depend not upon our human popularity but only upon those things we carry with us in the shipwreck of the world—a clear conscience and the love of God.

Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame.

—1 Peter 3:16

DAY 20: THE SCARS OF CHRIST

The scars of Christ teach us that life is a struggle—that the conditions for our final resurrection are the same as his. Unless we bear a cross in our lives, there will never be an empty tomb. Without Good Friday, there will never be Easter Sunday. Unless there is a crown of thorns, there will never be a halo of light. And unless we suffer with him, we shall not rise with him.

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us.

—Romans 8:18

DAY 21: BECOME A NEW PERSON

You can put off your old nature and put on a new. Since grace is regeneration, it makes little difference what your old nature was. If I throw away an old coat, it does not matter why. The only thing that matters is that I throw it away. And when I do so, I get a new coat.

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away see, everything has become new!

—2 Corinthians 5:17

DAY 22: GOD'S GRACE

God's grace is never wanting to those who long to cooperate with it. The desire and dedication to be wealthy lends way to wealth. The will to belong to Christ makes people Christians.

My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.

—2 Corinthians 12:9

DAY 23: DO NOT GIVE UP

Our occasional failures must not be mistaken for deserting God. Two attitudes are possible in sin: We can fall down and get up, or we can fall down and stay there. The fact of having fallen once should not discourage us. Because a child falls, he or she does not give up trying to walk.

So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up.

—Galatians 6:9

DAY 24: OUR HUNGER FOR GOD

Our hunger for the infinite is never quieted; even those disillusioned by excess of pleasures have always kept in their imagination a hope of finding a truer source of satisfaction than any they have. Our search for the never-ending love is never ending. Not everyone can identify this infinity, which they tend and yearn for, but it is what the rest of us call God.

As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God.

—Psalm 42:1

DAY 25: LOVE BEGETS LOVE

God did not love me because I am lovable. I became lovable because God poured some of his goodness and love into me. I then began to apply this charity to my neighbor. If I do not find him lovable, I have to put love into him as God puts love into me, and thereby I provoke the response of love.

Beloved let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

—1 John 4:7

DAY 26: A LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

Are you in the valley of despair? You should know that the Gospel of Christ can be heard as good news even by those whose life has been shattered by bad news, for only those who walk in darkness ever see the stars.

He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

—Colossians 1:13–14

DAY 27: ENCOURAGE THE FAINTHEARTED

The one who sees the most faults in his

neighbor is the one who has never looked inside his own soul...in meditation, by finding ourselves worse than others; we discover that most of our neighbors are better than ourselves.

And we urge you, beloved...encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all of them.

—1 Thessalonians 5:14

DAY 28: SURRENDER TO TRUTH

Abandonment of self to Truth is a prelude to entering into the joy of the Lord. Before a lump of clay can be formed into a shapely piece of pottery, it must first be abandoned to the potter and lie passive in his hands.

Yet, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand.

—Isaiah 64:8

DAY 29: GOOD THOUGHTS

Evil thoughts are best destroyed by good thoughts that crowd them; evil loves destroyed by stronger loves of good. Evil is not to be fought, head-on, by mere brute willpower; it is better for us to flank it, to drive it from the field by a greater love of God. A mind filled with ideas of love and beauty has little room for evil notions.

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

—Romans 12:21

DAY 30: BE PATIENT WITH GOD

Give God a chance. The prolongation of his incarnate life in the Church is an offer, not a demand. It is a gift, not a bargain. You can never deserve it, but you can receive it. God is on a quest for your soul. Whether you will know peace depends on your own will.

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.

—Ephesians 2:8

DAY 31: THE WAY TO PERFECTION

God wouldn't let you suffer pain or experience sadness if it didn't in some way minister to your perfection. If he didn't spare his own Son on the cross for the redemption of the world, then we know at times, we too may suffer that we might develop into happy and perfect children of a loving Father.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

—Romans 12:2

DAY 32: SANCTIFY THE MOMENT

Those who sanctify the moment and offer it up in union with God's will never become frustrated. They overcome all obstacles by making them occasions of prayer and channels of merit. What were constrictions are transformed into opportunities for growth.

When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we speak kindly.

—1 Corinthians 4:12–13

DAY 33: THE BELOVED

You will find that, as you pray, the nature of your requests will change. You will ask fewer and fewer things for yourself and more and more for his love. Isn't it true in human relationships that the more you love someone, the more you seek to give and the less you desire to receive?

The voice of my beloved! Look, he comes, leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills.

—Song of Songs 2:8

DAY 34: BECOMING YOU

Try meditation for at least fifteen minutes a day. You will make two great discoveries: who you really are and who you are on the way to becoming.

We do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day.

—2 Corinthians 4:16

DAY 35: PRAYER OF THE SAINTS

The person who thinks only of himself says only prayers of petition; the one who thinks of his neighbor says prayers of intercession; whoever thinks only of loving and serving God says prayers of abandonment to God's will, and this is the prayer of the saints.

Do not love the world or the things in the world...[T]he world and its desire are passing away, but those who do the will of God live forever.

—1 John 2:15, 17

DAY 36: TOWARD PEACE

The remaking of the world must always begin with the remaking of one ego. The largest share of the burden of saving the world weighs on those who boast that their bread is the bread of life and their wine is the wine of Christ. The gigantic task must be done one soul at a time—each single response to grace is a step taken toward peace and joy for all.

Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.

—Psalm 34:14

DAY 37: THE MIND OF CHRIST

The essence of Christianity consists not in obeying a set of commands, neither in submission to certain laws, nor in reading Scripture, nor solely in following the example of Christ. Before all else, it consists in being re-created, remade, and incorporated into the risen Christ so that we live his life, think his thoughts, and will his love.

For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.

—1 Corinthians 2:16

DAY 38: EMPTY YOURSELF

Asceticism and mortification are not the ends of a Christian life. They are only the means. The end is charity. Penance merely makes an aperture in ego into which the light of God can pour. As we deflate ourselves, God enters and fills us. And it is God's arrival that is the important thing.

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God...emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.

—Philippians 2:5–7

DAY 39: GETHSEMANE

No believer ever went into the Gethsemane of bitter grief but that he found his Master had gone a little farther.

And going a little farther, [Jesus] threw himself on the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want."

—Matthew 26:39

DAY 40: ENDURE SUFFERING

Even those who have some degree of sanctity find it hard, sometimes, to remain on the cross until the end. The world is full of half-crucified souls who have succumbed to the challenge of the world and come down from the cross. Few like our Savior will stay until the end that they, like him, might utter the cry of triumph: "It is finished."

I have fought the good fight; I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

—2 Timothy 4:7

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