

Lenten Reflections

February 28, 2020



St Francis Receiving the Stigmata – El Greco – Public Domain

<https://art.thewalters.org/detail/6457/saint-francis-receiving-the-stigmata-2/>

A few weeks ago, I began preparing for Lent. I started thinking about how I would use the season as a vehicle to draw closer to God. I previewed different Bible studies and considered different online groups. I was just about to click “buy” on a \$32 NEW, beautifully designed Lenten Bible study when I said to myself, “This is ridiculous. What about all of the other books you’ve purchased, the unfinished or unopened faith studies? What is so special about this NEW Bible study? What if you made a concerted effort to delve into your bookshelves and discover what is already there?” My finger, hovering over the “buy” button, navigated away from the website. Last week, I received a funds appeal from the Little Sisters of the Poor. I sent THEM the \$32, dusted off a journal I received for Christmas, and I’m revisiting some neglected resources on my bookshelf. Those books were once just as appealing to me as the new Lenten study. It’s time I rediscovered why.

I’m always looking for a way to make Lent “new and improved, now with extra holiness!” However, Lent offers us the opportunity to get back to basics. The season calls us to recognize that hunger we have inside ourselves and to satiate it with a relationship with God instead of more food, goods, or sin. Sometimes, we want to celebrate Lent the “right” way by throwing ourselves into asceticism. God just wants our attention and true devotion.

Going simpler this Lent is not easy for me. I want to buy ALL of the latest, best Bible studies and read ALL of the reflections. I tend to overwhelm myself with the Catholic stuff because I want to do it *right*. What I REALLY need is to get quiet. I need to eliminate the noise, even what seems like GOOD noise, so I can focus more on my relationship with God. In the first reading, Isaiah tells us that we *think* we know how God wants us to fast, but we’re

doing it wrong. Our sacrifices are unsuitable to Him if they are only a show. In Lent, God calls us to a true conversion of heart, not just external practice. He desires us to offer Him our small mortifications, not huge gestures of sacrifice. Each day, let's rise and humbly say, "God, today, I surrender my plans to you. How do YOU want me to sacrifice today? I'm listening, I'm watching, I'm waiting, and I'm ready to respond." That's our best Lenten practice, and it will help us grow in holiness more than any \$32 Bible study.

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Friday after Ash Wednesday

Lectionary: 221

Reading [1IS 58:1-9A](#)

Thus says the Lord GOD:

Cry out full-throated and unsparingly,
lift up your voice like a trumpet blast;
Tell my people their wickedness,
and the house of Jacob their sins.
They seek me day after day,
and desire to know my ways,
Like a nation that has done what is just
and not abandoned the law of their God;
They ask me to declare what is due them,
pleased to gain access to God.
"Why do we fast, and you do not see it?
afflict ourselves, and you take no note of it?"

Lo, on your fast day you carry out your own pursuits,
and drive all your laborers.
Yes, your fast ends in quarreling and fighting,
striking with wicked claw.
Would that today you might fast
so as to make your voice heard on high!
Is this the manner of fasting I wish,
of keeping a day of penance:
That a man bow his head like a reed
and lie in sackcloth and ashes?
Do you call this a fast,
a day acceptable to the LORD?
This, rather, is the fasting that I wish:
releasing those bound unjustly,
untying the thongs of the yoke;
Setting free the oppressed,
breaking every yoke;

Sharing your bread with the hungry,
sheltering the oppressed and the homeless;
Clothing the naked when you see them,
and not turning your back on your own.
Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
and your wound shall quickly be healed;
Your vindication shall go before you,
and the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.
Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer,
you shall cry for help, and he will say: Here I am!

Responsorial Psalm [51:3-4, 5-6AB, 18-19](#)

R. (19b) **A heart contrite and humbled, O God, you will not spurn.**

Have mercy on me, O God, in your goodness;
in the greatness of your compassion wipe out my offense.
Thoroughly wash me from my guilt
and of my sin cleanse me.

R. **A heart contrite and humbled, O God, you will not spurn.**

For I acknowledge my offense,
and my sin is before me always:
“Against you only have I sinned,
and done what is evil in your sight.”

R. **A heart contrite and humbled, O God, you will not spurn.**

For you are not pleased with sacrifices;
should I offer a burnt offering, you would not accept it.
My sacrifice, O God, is a contrite spirit;
a heart contrite and humbled, O God, you will not spurn.

R. **A heart contrite and humbled, O God, you will not spurn.**

Verse Before The Gospel [AM 5:14](#)

Seek good and not evil so that you may live,
and the Lord will be with you.

Gospel [MT 9:14-15](#)

The disciples of John approached Jesus and said,
“Why do we and the Pharisees fast much,
but your disciples do not fast?”
Jesus answered them, “Can the wedding guests mourn
as long as the bridegroom is with them?
The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them,
and then they will fast.”