

Bringing Home the Word

First Sunday of Lent | March 5, 2017

Framework for Conversion

By Mary Katharine Deeley

In the campus church where I work, more people show up on Ash Wednesday than on any other day. Practicing Catholics, Catholics who are a little or a lot out of practice, and non-Catholics who sense the need for a period of discipline stream through the doors to remember that they are dust and into dust they shall return.

With a cross smudged on their foreheads, they go out, sensing that this defined six-week block called Lent is a real chance to change course and renew their lives. Many of them return each Sunday to hear ancient stories and try to live into the good intentions symbolized by the ashes.

Ash Wednesday creates a framework for conversion, and the first Sunday of Lent tells us why we need it. The Genesis story is an explanation for the brokenness of the world that comes not from God's error in creation but from our desire to be God and control our own destiny. The creature cannot be the creator. We cannot know fully what God knows. For Adam and Eve, such knowledge is power, and they aren't content with what God has given them.

In the desert, Jesus is also tempted to show his power and take control from his Father. He could refuse to subject himself to God's will. He could make bread and force God to care for him. Even more, he could give power over to one who is not God. Instead, Jesus gives his life over to God. With his grace, we can do the same. Where are you being tempted to push God aside and take control? †

Lent gives us a chance to change course and renew our lives.

Sunday Readings

Genesis 2:7–9; 3:1–7

"The Lord God formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life."

Romans 5:12–19

"Through the obedience of the one, the many will be made righteous."

Matthew 4:1–11

"Then the devil left him and, behold, angels came and ministered to him."

A Word From Pope Francis

Only when the difficulties and suffering of others confront and question us may we begin our journey of conversion toward Easter. It is an itinerary which involves the Cross and self-denial....[The] elements of this spiritual journey: prayer, fasting and almsgiving (see Matthew 6:1–6; 16–18). All three exclude the need for appearances: what counts is not appearances; the value of life does not depend on the approval of others or on success, but on what we have inside us.

—Homily, March 5, 2014



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- When have you been tempted to make something in your life more important than God?
- How can you give your life over to God this Lent?

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Conversion as Dying/Rising

By Rev. James B. Dunning

Although conversion is no one-time born-again experience, each conversion is a new birth. All great moments of agony and ecstasy normally involve the trauma and triumph of birth. Especially at life's great turning points, we are like Abraham and Sarah setting out into the desert. Are we able to let go of control and journey in faith on uncharted paths?

Since Catholics are many times born again, we have sacraments and a liturgical year to celebrate and nourish this new creation. All of human life can be born again. The ordinary is born again into the extraordinary; our faith vision helps us see this. Sunday after Sunday, Lent after Lent, year after year, we bring all this to liturgy so that all of life and all creation might be born again and again through God's Spirit who makes all creation new.

A second image of conversion is the paschal mystery, namely, our entering the dying/rising of Jesus. This image is grounded in the RCIA. There the Church offers a vision of conversion for new members. The RCIA states that this also holds true for all members, since conversion is an ongoing journey. Again, the Catholic version of conversion is sacramental. Initiation is the first sharing in Christ's dying/rising. But all sacraments, especially the Eucharist, celebrate our experience of the death and resurrection of Christ.

For many people, dying often means a crisis. Dying can also mean the day-to-day dying of people who love, for example, in marriage, friendship, serving others. In Italian, *amore*, "love," has its roots in *morte*, "death." In the quiet dailiness of our relationships and vocations, we experience death to self and to our needs. This kind of dying is part of one's care, compassion, sensitivity, and love for others. We experience the new life that death brings. When we turn to God as the source of that life, conversion happens. †

Source: *Catholic Update*,
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The Way to Conversion

By Mary Carol Kendzia

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tells us, "Jesus' call to conversion and penance, like that of the prophets before him, does not aim first at outward works, 'sackcloth and ashes,' fasting and mortification, but at the conversion of the heart, interior conversion. Without this, such penances remain sterile and false" (*CCC* 1430).

A heart can be changed in a moment with a thought, a prayer, an insight, the gift of grace. Conversion integrates that change into our lives, our work, our practices, and our prayer. Conversion takes the divine spark that illuminates our very being and makes it real in the comings and goings of our days.

Few of us have that born-again, fall-off-the-horse conversion experience of St. Paul on the road to Damascus. Most of our conversion takes place slowly, daily, through the Spirit's more subtle action enfleshed in people and events.

Lent after Lent, year after year, we turn our minds and our hearts to God in a deeper and more focused way through the practices of fasting, prayer, and almsgiving. Repenting for the times and ways we turn from God, we seek to renew our lives, dying to our self in order to rise again on Easter. We also prepare to go into the baptismal water at the Easter Vigil and emerge a new Christian, a believer more firmly grounded in faith and committed to discipleship.

This is the promise held out to us each Lent. †

Source: *Liguorian*, © March 2014, Liguori Publications



Lord, deepen my awareness of and respect for your presence in creation and in the people around me.

—From *Mindful Meditations for Every Day in Ordinary Time*, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeny

WEEKDAY READINGS

March 6–11

Mon.	Lenten Weekday: Lv 19:1–2, 11–18 / Mt 25:31–46
Tue.	Lenten Weekday: Is 55:10–11 / Mt 6:7–15
Wed.	Lenten Weekday: Jon 3:1–10 / Lk 11:29–32
Thu.	Lenten Weekday: Est C:12, 14–16, 23–25 / Mt 7:7–12
Fri.	Lenten Weekday: Ez 18:21–28 / Mt 5:20–26
Sat.	Lenten Weekday: Dt 26:16–19 / Mt 5:43–48

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