



Invest just five minutes a day, and your faith will deepen and grow—a day at a time.

Thursday, Feb 01, 2018 Do the math

Teachers who have students work in pairs see many benefits to this strategy: The students take more responsibility for their learning; they mentor and encourage their partners and engage in creative problem-solving techniques, such as brainstorming; and they are less likely to become isolated and disillusioned. Surely Jesus was mindful of these benefits when he sent the 12 apostles out two by two to preach the Good News—and when he promised his presence wherever two or more are gathered in his name. Today's lesson: Work together to multiply the good.

TODAY'S READINGS: *1 Kings 2:1-4, 10-12; Mark 6:7-13 (326).* "He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two."

Friday, Feb 02, 2018 FEAST OF THE PRESENTATION OF THE LORD

You are dismissed

Simeon recognizes the infant Jesus as the promised savior and calls him a "light for revelation." Simeon joyfully exclaims that he is now free to go to his death in peace. His beautiful prayer, commonly called the Cantic of Simeon, is sung in monasteries and religious communities around the world as part of Night Prayer. Like Simeon, we, too, are the servants of God who, upon recognizing the light of Christ in the people we meet, may ask to be dismissed at the end of each day to go in peace—freed, at least for a time, from our responsibilities and anxieties.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Malachi 3:1-4; Hebrews 2:14-18; Luke 2:22-40 (524).* "My eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples."

Saturday, Feb 03, 2018 MEMORIAL OF BLAISE, BISHOP, MARTYR

A full-throated blessing

In the 14th century when the plague was devastating Europe, people desperate for a cure or to be spared the disease called upon the Fourteen Holy Helpers, a special group of saints whom they believed protected them from symptoms of this dreaded disease, like fevers, headaches, the deaths of animals, and in Saint Blaise's case, throat ailments. If you go to church today, chances are there will be a blessing of throats through the intercession of Blaise. While we need all the help we can get in cold and flu season, the crossed candles and the words of the blessing are more symbols of our faith in God to protect us from whatever ails us. Take advantage of this unique once-a-year custom.

TODAY'S READINGS: *1 Kings 3:4-13; Mark 6:30-34 (328).* "As Jesus went ashore, he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion for them."

Sunday, Feb 04, 2018

FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Let's magnify our unity

These days the game seems to be to capitalize on differences. Do you belong to the other (morally reprehensible) political party? Are you a member of the wrong religion—or no religion at all? Are you part of that bone-headed (fill-in-the-blank) generation? Are you less American than I am because of X, Y, or Z? Saint Paul chose a more challenging method of dialogue. He sought common ground: Are you from the Jewish or the Greek worldview? So am I! Are you a sinner or believer? Me too! Join the human race, and find family everywhere.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Job 7:1-4, 6-7; 1 Corinthians 9:16-19, 22-23; Mark 1:29-39 (74).* "I have become all things to all, to save at least some."

Monday, Feb 05, 2018

MEMORIAL OF AGATHA, VIRGIN, MARTYR

Inner peace be with you

It's stories like that of Agatha, a young virgin from Sicily (d. 251) who was tortured by having her breasts cut off, that make following in the footsteps of the saints seem so, well, horrible. But what's often missing from popular accounts of the lives of saints is their ability to find God, and therefore joy, in all things—including those experiences that an observer might consider unbearable. Today as we contemplate our own voluntary deprivations during the upcoming season of Lent, we can glimpse the inner peace that conquers hardship when our intention is, as Agatha put it, that "Christ possess alone all that I am."

TODAY'S READINGS: *1 Kings 8:1-7, 9-13; Mark 6:53-56 (329). "They . . . began to bring in the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was."*

Tuesday, Feb 06, 2018

MEMORIAL OF PAUL MIKI AND COMPANIONS, MARTYRS

Give your all

Japanese-born Paul Miki (1562-97) was baptized at age 5. A man of his culture with a profound knowledge of Buddhism, he made an effective and affectionate preacher among the Japanese. When his fellow Jesuits were expelled from Japan, he remained and was eventually crucified with 25 others in Nagasaki. For each generation of Christians the demands of faith and the promises of Christ remain the same: Love God and love one another and you will live in love eternally.

TODAY'S READINGS: *1 Kings 8:22-23, 27-30; Mark 7:1-13 (330). "You disregard God's commandment but cling to human tradition."*

Wednesday, Feb 07, 2018

What's for break-fast?

With the season of Lent and its practice of fasting arriving next week, it's a little puzzling to remember that Jesus was a great *breaker* of fasts and violator of religious food rules—that was one thing that got him into trouble with the authorities. His followers gathered grain on the Sabbath because they were hungry. He ate with sinners and outcasts. He simply *did not follow the rules*, but for a purpose: to show how the rules should not control but rather serve to bring a person into a more loving relationship with God and neighbor. What makes a person holy is not external observance but internal faith and love, which leads to right behavior.

TODAY'S READINGS: *1 Kings 10:1-10; Mark 7:14-23 (331). "Everything that goes into a person from outside cannot defile But what comes out of the man, that is what defiles."*

Thursday, Feb 08, 2018

MEMORIAL OF JEROME EMILIANI

Let the children come

Born into a noble family, Jerome Emiliani (1481-1537) led the life of a carefree and dissolute soldier. After being captured and imprisoned, however, he underwent a conversion. Upon release he began devoting his resources to overseeing the educations of his nephews and caring for the sick and poor. Eventually he dedicated himself to abandoned children, of whom he is now the patron saint. Jerome helps us to remember that unwanted children are all around us, and that all children need care and support.

TODAY'S READINGS: *1 Kings 11:4-13; Mark 7:24-30 (332). "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."*

Friday, Feb 09, 2018

Embody mercy

Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a theory in psychology that proposes that human beings must have their basic physical and emotional needs met before they can realize their fullest potential. Catholics are expected to help others satisfy those needs through the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, which include feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, and visiting the sick as well as teaching those who lack education, forgiving offenses willingly, and comforting the afflicted. Through works of mercy the world gets closer to reaching its fullest

potential. Let's all get to work!

TODAY'S READINGS: *1 Kings 11:29-32; 12:19; Mark 7:31-37 (333)*. "He makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."

Saturday, Feb 10, 2018

MEMORIAL OF SCHOLASTICA, VIRGIN

Devote yourself from beginning to end

We know few facts about Saint Scholastica: She lived in Italy in the fifth and sixth centuries, was the sister of Saint Benedict, became a nun and a prioress, and helped found Benedictine monasticism. Yet, thanks to two brief comments by Saint Gregory the Great, we know volumes about *how* she lived her life. Of her childhood Gregory wrote: "She was devoted to God from a very early age," and a few paragraphs later he added that when she died "her soul ascended into heaven in the likeness of a dove." Though seemingly innocuous, these comments are like bookends of Scholastica's existence and give us a sense of the rich content of her biography. As you think about your life's journey, what do your bookends look like?

TODAY'S READINGS: *1 Kings 12:26-32; 13:33-34; Mark 8:1-10 (334)*. "My heart is moved with pity for the crowd."

Sunday, Feb 11, 2018

SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Walk into the desert

Fans of Maria Muldaur recall the song "Midnight at the Oasis" and its incongruous line about sneaking off to a desert frolic amid the cacti. Ouch! A better reason to head out to the desert is to drink from the still and empty silence. It's one of those thin places where the veil between you and God becomes rapidly transparent. But you don't need arid terrain to meet your Maker. Find some local still space and visit there often.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Leviticus 13:1-2, 44-46; 1 Corinthians 10:31—11:1; Mark 1:40-45 (77)*. "[Jesus] remained outside in deserted places, and people kept coming to him from everywhere."

Monday, Feb 12, 2018

Time to go to trial

Everyone experiences difficulties at some point in their lives. No matter how fortunate a person may be, going a lifetime without adversity is next to impossible. The early church from time to time went through trials of a different sort: hostility, persecution, and the general tension of living in a world that did not share its beliefs. These days there is still friction between a life of faith and an increasingly skeptical world. The response of some is to condemn that world rather than engage it. On this score, however, contemporary Christians can learn from the first ones, who saw in trials the opportunity to grow in virtue and develop their faith.

TODAY'S READINGS: *James 1:1-11; Mark 8:11-13 (335)*. "Consider it all joy, my brothers and sisters, when you encounter various trials."

Tuesday, Feb 13, 2018

Rise up in faith

As any baker can tell you, a small amount of leaven—yeast—goes a long way, working its effect on a much larger mass of dough. For this reason Jews of Jesus' age saw the fermentation process brought on by leaven as a metaphor for a corrupting influence, something that in excess was in danger of overflowing its container. Jesus warned his disciples to be on guard against the "leaven" of leaders—religious or political—who sought to manipulate the people by exercising authority beyond proper boundaries. Jesus had a healthy skepticism about authority not grounded in humility and respect. And that's a wise attitude, history teaches us.

TODAY'S READINGS: *James 1:12-18; Mark 8:14-21 (336)*. "Guard against the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod."

Wednesday, Feb 14, 2018

ASH WEDNESDAY; DAY OF FAST AND ABSTINENCE

A day for lovers of mercy and kindness

From the time many of us were kids, our Lenten practice began with giving something up. This is the core of an ancient tradition of fasting, prayer, and almsgiving. In the words of fifth-century Doctor of the church Peter Chrysologus: "When you fast, see the fasting of others. If you want God to know you are hungry, know that another is hungry. If you hope for mercy, show mercy. If you look for kindness, show kindness. If you want to receive, give. . . . Let us use fasting to make up for what we have lost by despising others."

TODAY'S READINGS: *Joel 2:12-18; 2 Corinthians 5:20—6:2; Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18 (219). "And when you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites who show others they are fasting."*

Thursday, Feb 15, 2018

THURSDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY

Discernment is a gift

Some multiple-choice questions require no research whatsoever. When Moses sets life and death before the people and asks them to choose, the right answer is not obscure. When he likewise offers them blessings and curses, we know for sure which we would prefer. So why does human history so often swerve into the "death and curses" lane anyway? Because these options don't always come with truthful labels. Death-dealing situations arrive disguised as necessary evils, and curse-laden choices are sugarcoated with false promises. Discerning the true nature of things requires the Holy Spirit's guidance.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Deuteronomy 30:15-20; Luke 9:22-25 (220). "Today I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses."*

Friday, Feb 16, 2018

FRIDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY; DAY OF FAST AND ABSTINENCE

Be fast to offer assistance

Lent is just getting under way, a good time to carefully consider one of its key traditions: *fasting*. What can fasting mean in our health-conscious culture? The fasting of Lent is not about eating less for its own sake. In the Book of Isaiah, God addresses the mistake of settling for the outward trappings of penance. "Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free?" We're encouraged to fast by sharing our bread with the hungry and bringing the homeless into our own homes. Now that's some serious fasting!

TODAY'S READINGS: *Isaiah 58:1-9a; Matthew 9:14-15 (221). "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?"*

Saturday, Feb 17, 2018

SATURDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY; MEMORIAL OF THE SEVEN HOLY FOUNDERS OF THE SERVITE ORDER, RELIGIOUS

How can I be of service?

Imagine if seven of the leading citizens of New York, London, or Paris suddenly left it all behind and headed to the hills to dedicate their lives to God. That is how the Servite Order was founded in 13th-century Florence, a city flourishing with culture, trade, and political and religious intrigue. In 1240 seven noblemen of the city decided to withdraw from urban life to a solitary place for prayer and service of God. In their monastery they led a life of prayer, work, and silence while in the active apostolate they engaged in parish work, teaching, preaching, and other ministries. God calls all of us to service and prayer; at the end of the day, these are the actions that ennoble us all. How will you serve?

TODAY'S READINGS: *Isaiah 58:9b-14; Luke 5:27-32 (222). "Those who are healthy do not need a physician, but the sick do."*

Sunday, Feb 18, 2018

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

Get outside your comfort zone this Lent

The desert's a great place to encounter the Holy, as a long tradition of desert fathers and mothers attests. But the desert's a traditional place to make intimate acquaintance with your demons as well—which is another reason Jesus, and generations of his followers, made friends with cacti. It's also why we symbolically enter the Lenten desert each year, fasting, praying, and giving alms. We allow the normal lifestyle padding to wear a little thinner and feel our vulnerable spots with more clarity. Make a commitment this Lent to explore your limits. Bring an extra supply of humility!

TODAY'S READINGS: *Genesis 9:8-15; 1 Peter 3:18-22; Mark 1:12-15 (23). "The Spirit drove Jesus out into the desert, and he remained [there] . . . tempted by Satan."*

Monday, Feb 19, 2018

LENTEN WEEKDAY

Root yourself in solidarity

Jesus' core message—that we are one—is surely one of the great mysteries of existence. This truth is so hard to accept because our senses tell a different story: We are separate, different, and alone. We need an image to help us realize what our senses cannot. Picture the giant redwood trees of California: Did you know they only grow in groves? Moreover, each tree's roots extend and grasp the roots of the surrounding trees, forming a strong, interconnecting network that serves to nourish and sustain all of them equally. The next time you are tempted to think of someone as "the other," remember the redwood trees and their invisible, interlocking roots.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Leviticus 19:1-2, 11-18; Matthew 25:31-46 (224). "Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me."*

Tuesday, Feb 20, 2018

LENTEN WEEKDAY

Turn it over

One of the many advantages of memorized prayers such as the "Our Father" is that we can say them when we have no words of our own; we don't have to think. That's also one of their disadvantages: We don't have to think. In fact, we may have forgotten exactly what we are saying when we pray the "Our Father." For example, do we really mean, "Thy will be done?" or are there unspoken conditions attached: "Thy will be done—as long as it doesn't interfere with my carefully laid plans for my life"? To turn everything over to God is truly the only way to live without fear. It's what Jesus did; it's what we are called to do as well.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Isaiah 55:10-11; Matthew 6:7-15 (225). "This is how you are to pray: 'Our Father who art in heaven.'"*

Wednesday, Feb 21, 2018

MEMORIAL OF PETER DAMIEN, BISHOP, DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

Stick with what is priceless

Peter Damien (1007-72) was a generous giver. But simony—the practice of buying spiritual offices or spiritual authority—was one kind of giving he detested. The activity was widespread in the medieval church and did great damage to the church's moral standing, so much so that Dante condemned those who practiced simony to the eighth circle of hell. Perhaps the venue largely has shifted from church to state—where we find corporate lobbyists and other influence-peddlers with lots of cash—but the sin remains the same. Damien would not be amused to see simony persist in any form, and neither should we.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Jonah 3:1-10; Luke 11:29-32 (226). "Just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so will the Son of Man be to this generation."*

Thursday, Feb 22, 2018

FEAST OF THE CHAIR OF PETER THE APOSTLE

Pull up a seat

The Latin word for "chair" is *cathedra*, and a cathedra—you see where this is going—is the "seat" of a bishop, thus

making the bishop's church a *cathedral*. Today's feast, however, commemorates a particular "chair": that of Saint Peter and the authority Jesus gave him to be the primary leader of the early church. Peter was martyred in Rome, and so the "see" (*sedes*—"a place to sit") of Peter became the Holy See, the seat of the pope as the first among bishops and the leader of the Roman Catholic Church. As the Liturgy of the Hours says, the Feast of the Chair of Peter the Apostle is a day to celebrate the "unity of the church founded upon that apostle."

TODAY'S READINGS: *1 Peter 5:1-4; Matthew 16:13-19 (535)*. "You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church."

Friday, Feb 23, 2018

MEMORIAL OF POLYCARP, BISHOP AND MARTYR; DAY OF FAST AND ABSTINENCE

Be fruitful in faith

Polycarp died around the year 155 at the age of 87, so he was a very early Christian who lived while some of the original apostles were still alive. The apostle John appointed Polycarp bishop of the city of Smyrna (now Izmir in Turkey), where Polycarp faced many challenges during his long years in office. Christians were a persecuted minority, while most of the population still worshipped the Roman gods. During one persecution, Polycarp was captured and, even though very advanced in age, sentenced to be burned at the stake. But tradition has it that the flames would not burn him, so he was stabbed to death. His remains are entombed with honor in the church of St. Ambrose in Rome, and his long life of service to the early church is remembered each year on this day. The name Polycarp means "many fruits." May all of our lives be as fruitful!

TODAY'S READINGS: *Ezekiel 18:21-28; Matthew 5:20-26 (228)*. "Settle with your opponent quickly while on the way to court."

Saturday, Feb 24, 2018

LENTEN WEEKDAY

Less is more

The phrase "less is more" catches our attention because at first glance it seems illogical. How can less be more? They're opposites, and of the two, "more" is often regarded as better. But taken in a different light, the phrase makes good sense. Maybe we exercise restraint during a tense meeting with a coworker, saying only what is needed instead of saying something further in order to "win" an argument. Maybe we forgive someone who has hurt us with a lie instead of reminding them over and over that our pain is their fault. With less, we become more—more peaceful, more caring, more Christ-like.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Deuteronomy 26:16-19; Matthew 5:43-48 (229)*. "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."

Sunday, Feb 25, 2018

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

By special invitation

Who do you bring along when something special is about to happen? We know Jesus took his inner circle: Peter, James, and John. But on one particular outing, that favored grouping expanded into the Jewish equivalent of a fantasy dinner party, with Moses and Elijah pulling up a chair. No wonder Peter was tempted to linger. And he wasn't wrong: Pitching a tent with iconic teachers of Law and Prophecy is a great idea. Be a student of religious teaching, to appreciate human boundaries. Be a student of prophecy to know when boundaries must be surpassed.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Genesis 22:1-2, 9a, 10-13, 15-18; Romans 8:31b-34; Mark 9:2-10 (26)*. "Let us make three tents: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

Monday, Feb 26, 2018

LENTEN WEEKDAY

How do you measure up?

In biblical times getting a fair measure of grain at the market meant that the seller had to fill to overflowing the bushel that was used, then press down and shake the grain, repeating the process until the bushel was packed

tight. The amount was then poured into the hem of the buyer's garment, to be carried to its destination. Cheaters undoubtedly existed, but they would be discovered soon enough and punished. Though the technology of the marketplace has changed since biblical times, the ethical principles remain the same: Be honest in your business dealings, whether large or small. You'll sleep better at night and prosper better by day!

TODAY'S READINGS: *Daniel 9:4b-10; Luke 6:36-38 (230)*. "A good measure, packed together, shaken down, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap."

Tuesday, Feb 27, 2018

LENTEN WEEKDAY

Be a Lenten do-gooder

Today's gospel reading from Matthew gives us Lent in a nutshell: "Make yourselves clean, cease to do evil, learn to do good." The spiritual rewards for following this Lenten regimen are great. That's why so many of us try—but, sadly, too many of us fail. Our biggest stumbling block seems to be the final step of learning to do good. It's not that we don't know how to be good; we simply fail to make doing good a consistent, regular practice. This Lent, try following these steps toward becoming a daily do-gooder: Volunteer in your parish or community, be helpful and available to family and friends, donate money to charity, act cheerful—even when you're not.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Isaiah 1:10, 16-20; Matthew 23:1-12 (231)*. "Make yourselves clean; cease to do evil, learn to do good."

Wednesday, Feb 28, 2018

LENTEN WEEKDAY

Listen for the prophetic voice

The Israelites knew one thing about their prophets: They spoke the true word of God whether the message was welcome or not—and frequently it wasn't, even to the point of eliminating the prophet to still the voice they didn't wish to hear. Jesus encountered opposition as well. Plenty of people—especially powerful people—wanted to get him out of the way, but he and his gospel live on. Do you hear prophetic words spoken today in our world? How are they received? How do *you* receive them?

TODAY'S READINGS: *Jeremiah 18:18-20; Matthew 20:17-28 (232)*. "Instruction shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet."

Thursday, Mar 01, 2018

LENTEN WEEKDAY

Heartfelt advice

Sometimes you have to hear messages several times before they sink in, even ones that could save your life. "Don't text and drive." "Eat healthy food." "Get enough sleep." When you do hear the messages, you might be tempted to ignore them because to act on them may be inconvenient or take away time from your other responsibilities. But in the end it's in your own best interest as well as those around you to take life-saving information to heart. That includes the many things from the rich Christian tradition. "Trust God." "Be faithful." "Love your neighbor as yourself." Which will you take to heart today?

TODAY'S READINGS: *Jeremiah 17:5-10; Luke 16:19-31 (233)*. "If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone should rise from the dead."

Friday, Mar 02, 2018

LENTEN WEEKDAY; DAY OF FAST AND ABSTINENCE

Stick with the important stuff

Remember the treasure hunts of childhood—running around and trying to find something hidden away? Sometimes the clues given were obvious and sometimes they were confusing. But what a feeling when we found what we searched for. How we live our lives gives us clues to what we treasure. Lent helps us look at those clues more clearly. What are the treasures in our hearts? Abstain from the frivolous and find what is important—the love of God.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Genesis 37:3-4, 12-13a, 17b-28a; Matthew 21:33-43, 45-46 (234)*. "The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that will produce its fruit."

Saturday, Mar 03, 2018

MEMORIAL OF KATHARINE DREXEL, VIRGIN, RELIGIOUS FOUNDER

Extend the circle of love

Born into a wealthy Philadelphia family, Saint Katharine Drexel (1858-1955) eventually spent her large inheritance in founding a religious order, the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, and establishing schools and missions for Native Americans and African Americans, including Xavier University in New Orleans, the only predominantly black Catholic institution of higher learning in the United States. The sisters continue Mother Drexel's work today through prayer, counseling, education, health care, social work, and other works of mercy, especially in connection with the poor and oppressed and among Native American, African American, and Haitian peoples. Ahead of her time, Mother Drexel had a special concern for excluded people. Is there someone like that you can reach out to today?

TODAY'S READINGS: *Micah 7:14-15, 18-20; Luke 15:1-3, 11-32 (235). "Everything I have is yours."*

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