



INTRODUCTION

We all know that prayer is the foundation of a life of faith—and that Lent is a time to intensify our focus on prayer—but that doesn't mean it is easy to do. This devotional is written for busy Catholics who are looking for a simple way to anchor their hearts and minds in God's presence every day throughout the Lenten season, from Ash Wednesday through Holy Week to Easter Sunday.

The season of Lent is a time to bring intentionality to our faith through the practices of prayer, fasting, and good works. These disciplines increase our capacity to receive the new life that Jesus has already won for us. Lent is also a time to journey with catechumens in our parishes who are in the final stages of preparing for Baptism at the Easter Vigil and others who will complete their initiation into the Church through Confirmation and/or the Eucharist. Walking with these individuals reminds us that faith makes a difference in the way we live—that our relationship with Jesus and his Church sets us apart and changes the trajectory of our lives.

Music engages our emotions; it lifts our hearts, as we acknowledge at every Mass. Each day of this devotional opens with a small portion of the lyrics from a well-known hymn—often from the gospel music tradition—that calls us to conversion. A short reflection on that text follows, along with prayers for morning and evening and a simple, spiritually focused question to think about throughout your day.

To help you pray, you can access a playlist of the songs featured in this book at www.avemariapress.com/pages/what-wondrous-love-music via your web browser or the QR codes that appear throughout this book (just focus your smartphone's camera on the QR code, and it will surface a link to the right page). Each song used here has three or four versions available for you to linger over and pray with as you listen. You can find the complete lyrics for each song beginning on page 50.

Lent is not a time to make ourselves holy—only God can do that. The effort and discipline we bring to our Lenten practice is our way of turning our lives over to God, stepping into the wondrous love of Jesus and following him to new and abundant life.

Ave Maria Press is a publishing ministry of the Congregation of Holy Cross, a religious order with a mission to educate in the faith by forming minds and hearts and drawing people into community. This book draws on the spirit that animates these priests and brothers—especially their motto: *Ave Crux, spes unica*, or “Hail the Cross, our only hope.” Ave was founded more than 150 years ago to honor Mary, support the spiritual needs of our everyday living, and showcase the best of American Catholic writing.

Drawing on our Holy Cross heritage, Ave aims to set hearts on fire—and that’s the aim and hope for this Lent and Holy Week devotional. Thank you for being part of our family of faith!



February 18

ASH WEDNESDAY

Take up your cross, the Savior said,
if you would my disciple be.

Some of us have a detailed, robust program for the next forty days; some of us are just now thinking about where this Lenten season might take us. Either way, we begin our Lenten journey today with a sincere intention to follow Jesus more closely, knowing that his way leads us to the Cross.

We flock to the altar today to get ash smudged on our heads in the shape of a cross as a way to bear witness to this intention. Following Jesus means walking a path through suffering and sacrifice toward new life, just as he did. The ashes we wear also remind us of the urgency with which we seek transformation. We don't have unlimited time to grow in faithfulness. We will die one day, and our bodies will turn to dust. Now is the time to return to the Lord, to seek his mercy, and to ask for his strength.

Prayer for the Morning

Jesus, Our Savior, you bore the Cross with courage and love. I know this Lenten journey will lead me to a confrontation with the crosses in my life—help me embrace them with hope. Jesus, Our Way, walk with me.

Ponder for the Day

What are the crosses I am being asked to take up this Lent? What do I ask from Jesus to help me carry them?

Prayer for the Evening

Jesus, Our Savior, you opened a way for us through death to eternal life. Intensify my urgency to seek and find you, and help me hold tightly to you in the weeks ahead. Jesus, Our Way, seek and find me.

To listen to “Take Up Your Cross,” scan the QR code or visit www.avemariapress.com/pages/what-wondrous-love-music.





February 19

THURSDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY

Deny yourself, the world forsake,
and humbly follow after me.

Our Lenten disciplines of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving are all rooted in the principle of self-denial. We would like to direct our time and attention, our desires, and our resources toward our own self-gratification, but we were created for more than this kind of self-centeredness. We've tried living by placing ourselves at the center, only to find there emptiness and dissatisfaction. We know we'll find purpose and meaning in our lives only if we center ourselves on love of God and neighbor—especially those who need it the most.

We step into this Lent boldly unafraid to deny ourselves because we know a joy and promise far greater than anything the world can give us.

Prayer for the Morning

God of Love, you give us the world as though it were a garden to tend and grow—and in giving us yourself, you also provide us with so much more. Foster in me a desire for you that is stronger than my desire for self-satisfaction. God of Abundance, in you I have all I need.

Ponder for the Day

What is the most difficult disposition or habit for me to let go of in my quest for self-denial? Why do I cling to this attachment?

Prayer for the Evening

God of Love, you draw us to yourself through your Son, Jesus. Make me humble so that I can set aside my ways and follow him to you. God of Abundance, help me find you by letting go.



To listen to “Take Up Your Cross,” scan the QR code or visit



February 20

FRIDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY

Take up your cross, which gives you strength,
which makes your trembling spirit brave.

What a strange thing to believe—that we can become strong by taking up and embracing that which makes us weak. How is this possible?

If we rely on our own strength, this is not possible—our spirits tremble. But Jesus suffered and died on the Cross—and then conquered death by his Resurrection. In him we make our way to union with God, even in the darkest moments. Nothing can stand in the way of the Father's love for us—not even death—if we but welcome friendship with Jesus and commit to following him. Our goal this Lent is to grow closer to Christ—because we need him. We can't do this life on our own.

Prayer for the Morning

Lord of Life, you will enter any situation to seek us out and bring us to the Father. Find me in my weakness and help me trust your transformative love. Jesus, Our Brother, give me strength.

Ponder for the Day

What makes my spirit tremble? How can I invite the Lord into this situation?

Prayer for the Evening

Lord of Life, you willingly bore the Cross out of love for us—and you are near us in the crosses we carry. Help me face with honesty and courage the things that cause me grief and pain so that I might find you near me there. Jesus, Our Savior and Brother, make me brave.



February 21

SATURDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY

Take up your cross, be not ashamed! Let not disgrace your spirit fill!
For God himself endured to die upon a cross.

When we commit to facing our shortcomings and failings with honesty, we are confronted with shame. These feelings can become obstacles to our reaching for God because they can cause us to deem ourselves unworthy of God's love—a decision that is only God's to make.

Jesus embraced the Cross in order to prove to us that there is no end to God's love, no disgrace he will not endure to reach us. Many have tested the breadth and depth of his love and found no limit. God's boundless desire for us gives us confidence to reach for him despite our selfishness and imperfections; it also gives us courage to face those imperfections with clarity and sorrow for the ways they hold us back from loving as God does.

Prayer for the Morning

Saving God, you stop at nothing to reach us. Help me to be honest about the ways I've fallen short of my dignity as your child and to trust that you love me—even when I don't love myself. Loving God, draw near to me.

Ponder for the Day

What would change about my life if I reflected more of God's unconditional love?

Prayer for the Evening

Saving God, you are merciful and forgiving and want nothing more than for us to return to you with burning hearts. Meet me in my desire for you, and refine and purify me so that I can more fully reflect your image. Loving God, transform me.



To listen to "Take Up Your Cross" and "Forty Days and Forty Nights,"