

Essential
Lenten
Prayers

Essential



Prayers

PARACLETE PRESS



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BREWSTER, MASSACHUSETTS

2021 First Printing

Essential Lenten Prayers

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ISBN 978-1-64060-627-2

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Paraclete Press, editor.

Title: *Essential lenten prayers*.

Description: Brewster, Massachusetts : Paraclete Press, 2021. | Summary: “A companion book for anyone observing the Christian season of Lent, prayers and practices from a variety of denominations and traditions”-- Provided by publisher.

Identifiers: LCCN 2020036593 (print) | LCCN 2020036594 (ebook) | ISBN 9781640606272 | ISBN 9781640606289 (epub) | ISBN 9781640606296 (pdf)

Subjects: LCSH: Lent--Prayers and devotions.

Classification: LCC BV85 .E76 2021 (print) | LCC BV85 (ebook) | DDC 242/.8--dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020036593>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020036594>

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Published by Paraclete Press

Brewster, Massachusetts

www.paracletepress.com

Printed in the United States of America

“Pray as though everything depends on God.
Work as if everything depends on you.”

—*St. Augustine*



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INTRODUCTION

Lent is not only about giving things up. This is a time for refocusing and rededicating our lives. For Christians for millennia, Lent has been the most important season of life, much more vital, for instance, than Advent and Christmas, albeit with fewer celebrations.

For some Christians—St. Francis of Assisi, for example—Lent was so important that they would practice a “period of Lent” more than once a year. Today, we can at least do it once a year, for forty days, and try to do our best to do it well.

Lent is all about the profound ways we are reminded each year to turn again toward God. We have wandered. Our attention has been divided. We have lost our focus, our will. We have not loved God and others as we should. We should use this time well. Prayer can help.

It is common to refer to Lent as a period of forty days, but in truth, it is that and more.

After Ash Wednesday—which is always Day One—Lent continues for forty-six days until Easter Sunday. These are days for prayer, spiritual discipline, self-denial, and reflection. We enter into this time in the spirit of walking together with Christ through his preparation, then his Passion, and toward the Cross and the

Resurrection. These are days of our fullest expression of what it means to follow Jesus in everything.

We pray that these prayers, from Christian sources of many backgrounds, cultures, and traditions, will inspire and sustain you during this most important season.

—*The Editors at Paraclete Press*

Ash Wednesday



A PRAYER OF PERSONAL DEDICATION

Since we have made up our minds to devote this
brief period of time to him . . . let us
give it to him freely with our minds
unoccupied by other things.

We should make up our minds not to take
back the time we have committed
to him, no matter what kinds of trials
or annoyances we suffer.

Let me realize that this time is being lent to me
and it is not my own.

I can rightly be called to account for this time
if I am not prepared to devote it
entirely to God.

—*St. Teresa of Avila*

The Purpose of Ashes

The words that the priest or minister usually says when applying ashes to our foreheads are similar to these that God said to Adam and Eve after they had sinned, when God was sending them out of the Garden of Eden:

You are dust, and to dust you shall return.

(Genesis 3:19)

A PRAYER FOR LOVING OUR DUST

Lord, I know I am dust,
Before Your mercy, and
I am even dust
Before Your love, because
I know how You want to pick me up
In Your hands, and lovingly
Make me Your own.
That's what I want too, today.
Amen.

The Beginning of Lent with Ashes

Pope John Paul II said, to begin his 2004 Lenten message about the ashes we use on Ash Wednesday,

The evocative rite of the imposition of ashes marks the beginning of the holy season of Lent, when the Liturgy once more calls the faithful to radical conversion and trust in God's mercy.

This is the day the Lenten season officially begins for Christians in the Western tradition.

A PRAYER FOR CONVERSION

I want to follow You.

I will follow You.

I want to follow You.

I will follow You.

I'm sure I will keep following You.

Please help me follow You.

Amen.

Ashes in the Bible

The symbolism of ashes is something that Christians inherited from Judaism. Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures we see instances of the ancient Israelites using ashes to show their repentance—as when the King of Nineveh listened to this prophecy of Jonah:

Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's walk. And he cried out, "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth. When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. Then he had a proclamation made in Nineveh: "By the decree of the king and his nobles: No human being or animal, no herd or flock, shall taste anything. They shall not feed, nor shall they drink water. Human beings and animals shall be covered with sackcloth, and they shall cry mightily to God. All shall turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands. Who knows? God may relent and change his mind; he may turn from his fierce anger, so that we do not perish." When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

(Jonah 3:4–10)

The humility of ashes on Ash Wednesday is only the beginning of our learning again to be humble before God. This is a time for seeking God's presence in our lives, a time for introspection.

A PRAYER TO LISTEN

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty,
My memory, my understanding, and my entire will,
all I have and call my own.
You have given all to me.
To you, Lord, I return it.
Everything is yours. Do with it what You will.
Give me only your love and your grace.
That is enough for me. Amen.

—*St. Ignatius of Loyola*

A PRAYER FOR HELP IN PRAYER

O God, early in the morning I cry to you.
Help me to pray
And to concentrate my thoughts on you;
I can't do this alone.
In me there's darkness,
But with you there's light;
I'm lonely, but you don't leave me;
I'm feeble in heart, but with you there's help;
I'm restless, but with you there's peace.
In me there's bitterness, but with you there's patience;
I don't understand your ways,
But you know the way for me.

—*Dietrich Bonhoeffer*