

# LENTEN HEALING

40 DAYS TO SET YOU FREE FROM SIN

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## SESSION ONE: SLOTH + CONFUSION

ASH WEDNESDAY

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### KEY SCRIPTURE | Matthew 6:1–6, 16–18

Jesus said to his disciples: "Take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them; otherwise, you will have no recompense from your heavenly Father. When you give alms, do not blow a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets to win the praise of others. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing, so that your almsgiving may be secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you.

"When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners so that others may see them. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you.

"When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites. They neglect their appearance, so that they may appear to others to be fasting. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to be fasting, except to your Father who is hidden. And your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you."

- What words, phrases, or images jump out to you in this reading?
  - Jesus articulates three practices that have become central to the observance of Lent: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Which of these comes most naturally to you? Which of these do you find most challenging?
  - How will your own Lenten observance this year touch upon either or all three of these practices?
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## SLOTH

Our Lenten journey begins on Ash Wednesday, as we ponder the sin of sloth. Consider this definition on p. 2 of Lenten Healing: “We often think of sloth as being lazy, but the meaning of this sin is much deeper. St. Thomas Aquinas called sloth a sadness or ‘sorrow for spiritual good’ (Summa Theologica IIa IIae, q. 35, a. 1). Sloth is much more about what goes on inside of us than about our lack of action.” The passage goes on to suggest two factors to consider when examining whether sloth is in our life: balance and effort. A lack of either may reveal the presence of the sin of sloth in your life.

- What do you think of this definition of “sloth”? How else do you define it?
  - Where do you experience either a lack of balance or a lack of enthusiasm in your life?
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## CONFUSION

Our readings this week will connect the sin of sloth to the wound of confusion, defined as a “disorientation of our mind, emotion, or heart” (p. 5). This disorientation can keep us from making a decision, or it can lead us toward making a bad one. “Confusion is at the root,” our readings say, “but sloth is the fruit.”

- Think about a time when you have felt disoriented — whether mentally, emotionally, or even spiritually. Describe what confusion feels like and how it makes you react.
  - How do *you* think confusion connects to sloth?
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- How can you pray this week for the grace to face sloth and confusion in your own life?
- What else are you praying for this week?

**KEY SCRIPTURE** | Matthew 4:1-11

At that time Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was hungry. The tempter approached and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become loaves of bread." He said in reply, "It is written: One does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes forth from the mouth of God."

Then the devil took him to the holy city, and made him stand on the parapet of the temple, and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written: He will command his angels concerning you and with their hands they will support you, lest you dash your foot against a stone." Jesus answered him, "Again it is written, You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test."

Then the devil took him up to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in their magnificence, and he said to him, "All these I shall give to you, if you will prostrate yourself and worship me." At this, Jesus said to him, "Get away, Satan! It is written: The Lord, your God, shall you worship and him alone shall you serve."

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

- What words, phrases, or images jump out to you in this reading?
  - There are many ways to interpret what these temptations mean and how we experience them in our own lives. What would you say the devil is tempting Jesus with in this passage? Which of them resonates with you most deeply?
  - In Matthew's Gospel, the devil specifically tempts Jesus by saying, "If you are the Son of God...", the same taunt Jesus will hear on the Cross, too (see Matthew 27:40). Why do you think the devil starts with Jesus' identity? Do you think he does the same for you?
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## PRIDE

Our readings this week will point to St. Thomas Aquinas's definition of pride as "the love of one's own excellence" (Summa Theologica IIa IIae, q. 162, obj 2). It roots this overinflated love in the thoughts and beliefs we have which tell us, "You don't need anybody" or "You can do this on your own" (p. 22). Instead of this "queen of all vices" (which is just as present in feelings of quiet piety and false humility)!, we are invited to trust ourselves to God.

- What do you think of this definition of "pride"? How else would you define it?
  - Where do you experience this sense of self-reliance in your own life? Would you consider yourself more "loud and bombastic" or "quietly pious and falsely humble"?
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## ABANDONMENT

The readings will connect pride to the wound of abandonment and those experiences of feeling "alone, isolated, unprotected or uncovered" (p. 34). These can lead to feelings that we will always be alone or that nobody will ever be there to protect us. They can create a sense of being hyperloyal ourselves — or even demanding this of others.

- Have you ever experienced abandonment in your own life? What did it feel like?
  - How do *you* think pride connects to abandonment?
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- How can you pray this week for the grace to face pride and abandonment in your own life?
- What else are you praying for this week?



## ENVY

Our readings this week focus on envy and the “lack of kindness, mercy, and love” that we feel when we “compare ourselves to others in a way that breeds sorrow and sadness” (p. 48). This can go as far as rejoicing in others’ misfortune and even being willing to actively tear them down — actions that only make our sorrow worse.

- What do you think of this definition of “envy”? How else would you define it?
  - Why do you think it’s so easy to fall into the trap of comparing ourselves to others? Do you find that it leads to being judgmental or unkind?
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## SHAME

What do you believe God sees when God looks at you? Shame is the wound that tells us that God is disappointed when God looks at us — that we are a disappointment and that we’re inferior in some way. Shame causes us to hide because we believe our identity is defined by our failure or undesirability. This, in turn, can ironically push us further from God’s mercy.

- How do you experience this sense of “not being enough” in your own life? How does it manifest for you?
  - How do *you* think envy connects to shame?
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- How can you pray this week for the grace to face envy and shame in your own life?
- What else are you praying for this week?

**KEY SCRIPTURE** | John 4:5–15, 19b–26, 39a, 40–42

Jesus came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of land that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there. Jesus, tired from his journey, sat down there at the well. It was about noon. A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." His disciples had gone into the town to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to him, "How can you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?"—For Jews use nothing in common with Samaritans.—Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God and who is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you do not even have a bucket and the cistern is deep; where then can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us this cistern and drank from it himself with his children and his flocks?" Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again; but whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst; the water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may not be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water. "I can see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain; but you people say that the place to worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus said to her, "Believe me, woman, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You people worship what you do not understand; we worship what we understand, because salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when true worshippers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth; and indeed the Father seeks such people to worship him. God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and truth." The woman said to him, "I know that the Messiah is coming, the one called the Christ; when he comes, he will tell us everything." Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking with you." Many of the Samaritans of that town began to believe in him. When the Samaritans came to him, they invited him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. Many more began to believe in him because of his word, and they said to the woman, "We no longer believe because of your word; for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the savior of the world."

- What words, phrases, or images jump out to you in this reading?
  - Jesus' exchange with the woman crosses many boundaries: he is a Jew, while she is a Samaritan; he is a man, while she is an unmarried woman; he is the Son of God, and she is caught in sin. How does Jesus' relentless love and boundless mercy in this story make you feel?
  - Notice the woman's reaction to her encounter with Jesus. Have you had similar experiences that have restored you to hope, causing you to overflow with God's love?
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## GREED

This week, our readings focus on greed and, especially, how this sin grows from the inside out. Greed tells us there will never be enough and motivates us to accumulate possessions at the expense of love and personal relationships. Deep down, it reflects a belief that “our dreams, wishes, and needs won’t be fulfilled” (p. 72).

- What do you think of this definition of “greed”? How else would you define it?
  - When have you felt overly concerned with not having enough? Has it ever affected relationships you have had?
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## HOPELESSNESS

The readings then connect greed to the wound of hopelessness, defining it as a lack of the two “ingredients” of hope: “the desire for something and the belief that it might happen” (p.75). Hopelessness leads to apathy and thoughts like, “What’s the point?” or “It won’t get any better,” sometimes resulting in the belief that God doesn’t really care either.

- Have you ever experienced hopelessness in your own life? What did it feel like?
  - How do *you* think greed connects to hopelessness?
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- How can you pray this week for the grace to face greed and hopelessness in your own life?
- What else are you praying for this week?

**KEY SCRIPTURE** | John 9:1, 6–9, 13–17, 34–38

As Jesus passed by he saw a man blind from birth. He spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva, and smeared the clay on his eyes, and said to him, “Go wash in the Pool of Siloam” — which means Sent —. So he went and washed, and came back able to see.

His neighbors and those who had seen him earlier as a beggar said, “Isn’t this the one who used to sit and beg?” Some said, “It is,” but others said, “No, he just looks like him.” He said, “I am.”

They brought the one who was once blind to the Pharisees. Now Jesus had made clay and opened his eyes on a sabbath. So then the Pharisees also asked him how he was able to see. He said to them, “He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and now I can see.” So some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, because he does not keep the sabbath.” But others said, “How can a sinful man do such signs?” And there was a division among them. So they said to the blind man again, “What do you have to say about him, since he opened your eyes?” He said, “He is a prophet.”

They answered and said to him, “You were born totally in sin, and are you trying to teach us?” Then they threw him out.

When Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, he found him and said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” He answered and said, “Who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?” Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.” He said, “I do believe, Lord,” and he worshiped him.

- What words, phrases, or images jump out to you in this reading?
- Note the progression of titles the blind man uses to refer to Jesus: “man” to “prophet” to “Lord.” How do you think this parallels the miracle he receives?
- The Pharisees are convinced that the man’s blindness is the result of sin — a superstition that many of us continue to hold onto today. Why do you think we tend to blame God or blame ourselves when something wrong happens in our life?

## GLUTTONY

This week, we take a look at the sin of gluttony. Questions of food, diet, and body image can be difficult areas to reflect on, so we are invited to consider gluttony's deeper meaning regarding overindulgence and the separation of pleasure from its purpose (p. 98). This can manifest in many ways, and it can even affect our relationship with God if all we expect from God is the good things God gives us.

- What do you think of this definition of "gluttony"? How else would you define it?
  - Does the pursuit of pleasure ever become gluttonous for you? When do you find yourself overindulging?
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## FEAR

The readings consider gluttony's relationship with the wound of fear. While fear evolved naturally and leads to the survival responses of fighting, fleeing, or freezing, fear becomes a wound when it arises based merely "on the perception that something bad might happen" (p. 100). These may be connected to deeper wounds and even trauma. But remember what we are told over and over again in Scripture: do not be afraid!

- What have been some pivotal moments where you felt fear in your own life? What were you feeling in these movement?
  - How do *you* think gluttony connects to fear?
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- How can you pray this week for the grace to face gluttony and fear in your own life?
- What else are you praying for this week?

**KEY SCRIPTURE** | John 11:3–7, 17, 20–27, 33b–45

The sisters of Lazarus sent word to Jesus, saying, “Master, the one you love is ill.” When Jesus heard this he said, “This illness is not to end in death, but is for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it.” Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that he was ill, he remained for two days in the place where he was. Then after this he said to his disciples, “Let us go back to Judea.” When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him; but Mary sat at home. Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you.” Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise.” Martha said, “I know he will rise, in the resurrection on the last day.” Jesus told her, “I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” She said to him, “Yes, Lord. I have come to believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world.” He became perturbed and deeply troubled, and said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Sir, come and see.” And Jesus wept. So the Jews said, “See how he loved him.” But some of them said, “Could not the one who opened the eyes of the blind man have done something so that this man would not have died?” So Jesus, perturbed again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay across it. Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the dead man’s sister, said to him, “Lord, by now there will be a stench; he has been dead for four days.” Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?” So they took away the stone. And Jesus raised his eyes and said, “Father, I thank you for hearing me. I know that you always hear me; but because of the crowd here I have said this, that they may believe that you sent me.” And when he had said this, He cried out in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” The dead man came out, tied hand and foot with burial bands, and his face was wrapped in a cloth. So Jesus said to them, “Untie him and let him go.” Now many of the Jews who had come to Mary and seen what he had done began to believe in him.

- What words, phrases, or images jump out to you in this reading?
- After commanding Lazarus to come out from his tomb, Jesus commands those around him to “untie” him — the same verb used in reference to the Church’s authority to bind and “loosen,” i.e. to forgive sin. At this stage of your Lenten journey, what do you hope to be “untied” from? How is Jesus calling you to come out of your tomb?
- Martha is often chastised for being “anxious and worries about many things” (Luke 10:41), but here her confrontation with Jesus seems much more warranted. Do you identify with Martha and her frustration with Jesus’ delay? When have you felt similarly?

## ANGER

This week's readings discuss the sin of anger, describing it as a "wild animal" that "wants to destroy everything around it while destroying itself in the process" (p. 122). Of course, it is easy to notice outward, more explosive expressions of anger. But we are also invited to consider more subtle expressions (e.g. passive aggressive behavior), which is just as common.

- What do you think of this understanding of "anger"? How else would you define it?
  - Do you struggle with anger? What makes you angry, and how do you act on it?
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## REJECTION

While anger is connected to many wounds, this week especially focuses on the wound of rejection. This wound is more common than we might think! It is a "wound of belonging" which negatively affects our identity and the way we understand ourselves (p. 132). Left undealt with, rejection can bear even more destructive fruit and continue the endless cycle.

- Have you ever been rejected or experienced rejection? What did it feel like?
  - How do *you* think anger connects to rejection?
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- How can you pray this week for the grace to face anger and rejection in your own life?
- What else are you praying for this week?

**KEY SCRIPTURE** | Matthew 27:33–50

And when they came to a place called Golgotha — which means Place of the Skull —, they gave Jesus wine to drink mixed with gall. But when he had tasted it, he refused to drink. After they had crucified him, they divided his garments by casting lots; then they sat down and kept watch over him there. And they placed over his head the written charge against him: This is Jesus, the King of the Jews. Two revolutionaries were crucified with him, one on his right and the other on his left. Those passing by reviled him, shaking their heads and saying, “You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself, if you are the Son of God, and come down from the cross!” Likewise the chief priests with the scribes and elders mocked him and said, “He saved others; he cannot save himself. So he is the king of Israel! Let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now if he wants him. For he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’” The revolutionaries who were crucified with him also kept abusing him in the same way.

From noon onward, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And about three o'clock Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Some of the bystanders who heard it said, “This one is calling for Elijah.” Immediately one of them ran to get a sponge; he soaked it in wine, and putting it on a reed, gave it to him to drink. But the rest said, “Wait, let us see if Elijah comes to save him.” But Jesus cried out again in a loud voice, and gave up his spirit.

- What words, phrases, or images jump out to you in this reading?
- Take a moment to reflect on the reality that the Son of God *actually* existed and *actually* died. What strikes your heart as you ponder that reality today?
- The crowd’s mocking of Jesus completes the temptation story we heard at the beginning of Lent as they echo the devil’s taunt: “If you are the Son of God...” What does it mean to you that Jesus continues to assert his identity in perfect obedience to the Father’s will?

## LUST

This week's readings focus on lust. Lust, like gluttony, is a broad category that is about much more than merely sexual desire. It is "an attachment to pleasures of the flesh...at the expense of other people" (p. 144). In other words, it turns other people into things. It is a violation of their dignity and the taking of something that doesn't belong to us.

- What do you think of this definition of "lust"? How else would you define it?
  - Where does lust appear in your own life? When does your own desire for pleasure or satisfaction reduce others into objects?
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## POWERLESSNESS

The readings also consider lust's connection to the wound of powerlessness. Powerlessness is a normal part of being human, but it can wound us when we attempt to push it away. Often, instead of trusting God, we trust in ourselves and end up feeling overwhelmed with the belief that "there is no way out" (p. 146). However, especially this Holy Week, we are invited to consider that God's glory is revealed precisely in the powerlessness of Christ.

- When do you feel powerless? How does it make you feel?
  - How do *you* think lust connects to powerlessness?
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- How can you pray this week for the grace to face anger and rejection in your own life?
- What else are you praying for this week?