

Orantes

Newsletter of the Office for Divine Worship
of the Diocese of Worcester

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PREPARING FOR LENT

In September of 2019, the Liturgy Newsletter of the Diocese of Worcester was revived under the title *Orantes*. Since that time, nearly seven hundred pages of commentary and documentation have been published to support pastors and their collaborators seeking to implement the Church's liturgical renewal.

We have recently prepared a PDF redaction of all published issues of this newsletter, entitled ORANTES 2019-2023 which can be downloaded from worcesterdiocese.org/orantes along with an index of its articles.

In the light of this new redaction, we recommend to you the following previously published resources on preparing for the Lenten Season. Pagination is taken from the redacted file, ORANTES 2019-2023.

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This issue of *Orantes* provides three additional resources for Lent, beginning with Pope Francis' 2024 Lenten Message (page 3), a summary article on Lent and the Initiation of Adults (page 8) and reflections on Lenten Prayer and Penitential Practice drawn from patristic and liturgical sources (page 12).



Pope Francis' Lenten Message 2024

Through the Desert God Leads us to Freedom

Dear brothers and sisters!

When our God reveals himself, his message is always one of freedom: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”¹ These are the first words of the Decalogue given to Moses on Mount Sinai. Those who heard them were quite familiar with the exodus of which God spoke: the experience of their bondage still weighed heavily upon them. In the desert, they received the “Ten Words” as a thoroughfare to freedom. We call them “commandments”, in order to emphasize the strength of the love by which God shapes his people. The call to freedom is a demanding one. It is not answered straightaway; it has to mature as part of a journey.

Just as Israel in the desert still clung to Egypt – often longing for the past and grumbling against the Lord and Moses – today too, God’s people can cling to an oppressive bondage that it is called to leave behind. We realize how true this is at those moments when we feel hopeless, wandering through life like a desert and lacking a promised land as our destination. Lent is the season of grace in which the desert can become once more – in the words of the prophet Hosea – the place of our first love.² *God shapes his people, he enables us to leave our slavery behind* and experience a Passover from death to life. Like a bridegroom, the Lord draws us once more to himself, whispering words of love to our hearts.

The exodus from slavery to freedom is no abstract journey. If our celebration of Lent is to be concrete, the first step is to desire to *open our eyes to reality*. When the Lord calls out to Moses from the burning bush, he immediately shows



¹ Exodus 20:2.

² Hosea 2:16-17.

that he is a God who sees and, above all, hears: “I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey.³ Today too, the cry of so many of our oppressed brothers and sisters rises to heaven. Let us ask ourselves: Do we hear that cry? Does it trouble us? Does it move us? All too many things keep us apart from each other, denying the fraternity that, from the beginning, binds us to one another.



During my visit to Lampedusa, as a way of countering the globalization of indifference, I asked two questions, which have become more and more pressing: “Where are you?” (*Gen* 3:9) and “Where is your brother?”⁴ Our Lenten journey will be concrete if, by listening once more to those two questions, we realize that even today we remain under the rule of Pharaoh. A rule that makes us weary and indifferent. A model of growth that divides and robs us of a future. Earth, air and water are polluted, but so are our souls. True, Baptism has begun our process of liberation, yet there remains in us an inexplicable longing for slavery. A kind of attraction to the security of familiar things, to the detriment of our freedom.

In the Exodus account, there is a significant detail: it is God who sees, is moved and brings freedom; Israel does not ask for this. Pharaoh stifles dreams, blocks the view of heaven, makes it appear that this world, in which human dignity is trampled upon and authentic bonds are denied, can never change. He put everything in bondage to himself.

Let us ask: Do I want a new world? Am I ready to leave behind my compromises with the old? The witness of many of my brother bishops and a great number of those who work for peace and justice has increasingly convinced me

³ Exodus 3:7-8.

⁴ Genesis 4:9.

that we need to combat a deficit of hope that stifles dreams and the silent cry that reaches to heaven and moves the heart of God. This “deficit of hope” is not unlike the nostalgia for slavery that paralyzed Israel in the desert and prevented it from moving forward. An exodus can be interrupted: how else can we explain the fact that humanity has arrived at the threshold of universal fraternity and at levels of scientific, technical, cultural, and juridical development capable of guaranteeing dignity to all, yet gropes about in the darkness of inequality and conflict.



God has not grown weary of us. Let us welcome Lent as the great season in which he reminds us: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”⁵ Lent is *a season of conversion, a time of freedom*. Jesus himself, as we recall each year on the first Sunday of Lent, was driven into the desert by the Spirit in order to be tempted in freedom. For forty days, he will stand before us and with us: the incarnate Son. Unlike Pharaoh, God does not want subjects, but sons and daughters. The desert is the place where our freedom can mature in a personal decision not to fall back into slavery. In Lent, we find new criteria of justice and a community with which we can press forward on a road not yet taken.

This, however, entails *a struggle*, as the book of Exodus and the temptations of Jesus in the desert make clear to us. The voice of God, who says, “You are my Son, the Beloved, and “You shall have no other gods before me”⁶ is opposed by the enemy and his lies. Even more to be feared than Pharaoh are the idols that we set up for ourselves; we can consider them as his voice speaking within us. To be all-powerful, to be looked up to by all, to domineer over others: every human being is aware of how deeply seductive that lie can be. It is a road well-travelled. We can become attached to money, to certain projects, ideas or goals, to our position, to a tradition, even to certain individuals. Instead of making us move forward, they paralyze us. Instead of encounter,

⁵ Exodus 20:2.

⁶ Exodus 20:3.

they create conflict. Yet there is also a new humanity, a people of the little ones and of the humble who have not yielded to the allure of the lie. Whereas those who serve idols become like them, mute, blind, deaf and immobile,⁷ the poor of spirit are open and ready: a silent force of good that heals and sustains the world.

It is time to act, and in Lent, *to act also means to pause*. To pause *in prayer*, in order to receive the word of God, to pause like the Samaritan *in the presence of a wounded brother or sister*. Love of God and love of neighbor are one love. Not to have other gods is to pause in the presence of God beside the flesh of our neighbor. For this reason, prayer, almsgiving and fasting are not three unrelated acts, but a single movement of openness and self-emptying, in which we cast out the idols that weigh us down, the attachments that imprison us. Then the atrophied and isolated heart will revive. Slow down, then, and pause! The contemplative dimension of life that Lent helps us to rediscover will release new energies. In the presence of God, we become brothers and sisters, more sensitive to one another: in place of threats and enemies, we discover companions and fellow travelers. This is God's dream, the promised land to which we journey once we have left our slavery behind.

The Church's synodal form, which in these years we are rediscovering and cultivating, suggests that Lent is also *a time of communitarian decisions*, of decisions, small and large, that are countercurrent. Decisions capable of altering the daily lives of individuals and entire neighborhoods, such as the ways we acquire goods, care for creation, and strive to include those who go unseen or are looked down upon. I invite every Christian community to do just this: to offer its members moments set aside to rethink their lifestyles, times to examine their presence in society and the contribution they make to its betterment. Woe to us if our Christian penance were to resemble the kind of penance that so dismayed Jesus. To us too, he says: "Whenever you fast, do



⁷ cf. Psalm 114:4.

not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting.”⁸ Instead, let others see joyful faces, catch the scent of freedom and experience the love that makes all things new, beginning with the smallest and those nearest to us. This can happen in every one of our Christian communities.

To the extent that this Lent becomes a time of conversion, an anxious humanity will notice a burst of creativity, a flash of new hope. Allow me to repeat what I told the young people whom I met in Lisbon last summer: “Keep seeking and be ready to take risks. At this moment in time, we face enormous risks; we hear the painful plea of so many people. Indeed, we are experiencing a third world war fought piecemeal. Yet let us find the courage to see our world, not as being in its death throes but in a process of giving birth, not at the end but at the beginning of a great new chapter of history. We need courage to think like this.”⁹ Such is the courage of conversion, born of coming up from slavery. For faith and charity take hope, this small child, by the hand. They teach her to walk, and at the same time, she leads them forward.

I bless all of you and your Lenten journey.



Franciscus

⁸ Matthew 6:16

⁹ *Address to University Students*, 3 August 2023

Lent and the Initiation of Adults

The Second step in the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* is marked by the celebration of the “Rite of Election of those to be Baptized” and the “Enrollment Of the Names of Those to be Received into the Church.” There follows, usually coinciding with the Season of Lent, a “Period of Purification and Enlightenment,” “a period of more intense spiritual preparation, consisting more in interior reflection than in catechetical instruction, and is intended to purify the minds and hearts of the elect as they search their own consciences and do penance .”¹⁰

The Scrutinies

From the beginning of the sixth century, the Scrutinies were celebrated on the third, fourth and fifth Sundays of Lent, as “rites for self-searching and repentance,” concluding with an exorcism. They are “meant to uncover, then heal all that is weak, defective, or sinful in the hearts of the elect; to bring out, then strengthen all that is upright, strong, and good.”¹¹

The inclusion of an exorcism in each scrutiny is an ancient practice which may seem alien to the modern mind. In 1977, Father Adrian Nocent, a member of the Consilium for the Implementation of the Constitution on the Liturgy, explains the reason why these exorcisms were revived:

The Church has never thought that her catechumens required a merely intellectual and religious or doctrinal preparation. The efforts of these individuals to absorb the teaching given them and to observe the moral law could be but an imperfect preparation. God himself had to prepare the candidates in a progressive way by causing his grace to permeate their souls. That is precisely the



¹⁰ Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults [RCIA], no. 126.

¹¹ RCIA, no. 128.

significance of the exorcisms that the candidates underwent.¹²

Each scrutiny begins with an invitation to pray that the elect receive “a spirit of repentance, a sense of sin and strength of will to live in true freedom as children of God.” There follows a Prayer of the Faithful and then a Prayer addressed to God the Father, followed by a silent imposition of hands and a prayer of exorcism addressed to Christ.

The First Scrutiny

The first Scrutiny centers around the mystery of sin, inviting the elect to open their lives to Christ, the living water, who alone possess the power to wash away our sins. For this reason, the First Scrutiny always includes the Gospel of the Samaritan Woman.



At the end of the Prayer of the Faithful, the prayer to God the Father describes the elect as “like the woman of Samaria” in thirsting for living water. It continues:

Protect them from vain reliance on self
and defend them from the power of Satan.
Free them from the spirit of deceit,
so that, admitting the wrong they have done,
they may attain purity of heart
and advance on the way to salvation.

The exorcism prayer which follows the imposition of hands reinforces this theme, asking that the elect “lay bare their hidden wounds,” and that God “free them from their infirmities, heal their sickness, quench their thirst and give them peace.”

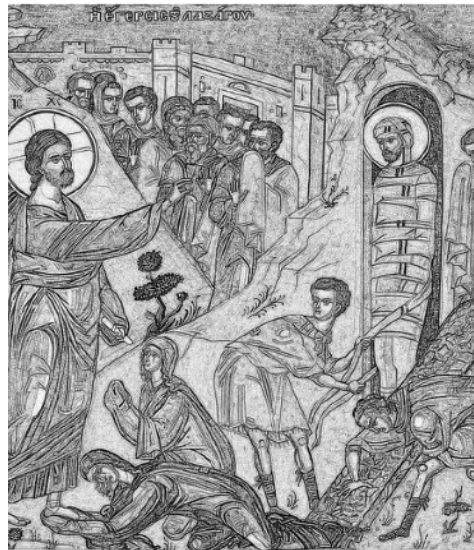
¹² Adrian Nocent, *The Liturgical year* (Liturgical Press, 1977) volume II. page 64.



The Second Scrutiny

The second Scrutiny, which always includes the Gospel of the man born blind begins by inviting the elect to conversion, and to hold fast to Christ, the light of the world, who delivers us from the powers of darkness.

The Prayer of Exorcism asks that God free the elect “from the false values that surround and blind them [and] and lead them firmly in your truth, children of the light for ever.” The exorcism asks that the Lord, “free those who are enslaved by the father of lies” and “let them rejoice in your light” as “staunch and fearless witnesses to the faith.”



The Third Scrutiny

The final Scrutiny, which always includes the Gospel of the Resurrection of Lazarus, introduces the elect to the mystery of Christ, the resurrection and the life.

The Prayer then refers to God the Father as “God not of the dead but of the living” and asks him to “snatch us from the realm of death, and lead us to the resurrection.” Similarly, the prayer of exorcism asks that Christ “free from the grasp of death those who await your life-giving sacraments and deliver them from the spirit of corruption.”

The Presentations

From the fifth century, as today, the Church has presented to the elect the two texts which “have always been regarded as expressing the heart of the Church’s faith and prayer,” the Creed and the Lord’s Prayer. The rite retains, on an optional basis, a curious characteristic from these early days, whereby the Church first presents (*traditio*) the Creed and Lord’s Prayer, and then invites the elect to “hand them back” (*redditio*) by reciting them on Holy Saturday morning.

The Creed is usually presented during the week following the first scrutiny and the rite recommends that the elect commit it to memory, so that they may be able

to recite it by heart at the rites of immediate preparation on Holy Saturday.

The Lord's Prayer is usually presented during the week following the third scrutiny, but may be included among the Rites of Immediate Preparation on Holy Saturday.

The Rites of Immediate Preparation

The Elect are urged to set aside Holy Saturday as a time of prayer, reflection and fasting. The presentation of the Lord's Prayer, the recitation from memory of the Creed, the *Ephphetha* Rite, the choosing of a baptismal name and the anointing with the Oil of Catechumens may be celebrated.



On Lenten Prayer and Penitential Practice

The first Preface for Lent describes the forty days as an of anticipation of the Sacred Paschal Feasts, during which the faithful

...more eagerly intent on prayer
and on the works of charity,
and participating in the mysteries
by which they have been reborn,
they may be led to the fullness of grace
that you bestow on your sons and daughters.¹³

Thus, Saint Augustine advises us that the heart of the Lenten journey is a deepening of the life of prayer, whereby we are more closely joined to Christ “in his crucifixion by mastering our appetites and fixing them to the Cross...”¹⁴

This deepening of prayer in Christ, motivated, by a “prompt devotion and eager faith,”¹⁵ is sustained by “the venerable exercises of holy devotion,”¹⁶ penitential acts which act as “fitting helps for us in our weakness”¹⁷

Prayer Sustained by Fasting and Almsgiving

Two “age-old disciplines”¹⁸ have been adopted by the Church as the primary means of offering “the sacrifice of our Lenten observance,”¹⁹ fasting and almsgiving.

In the words of Saint Augustine, fasting and almsgiving “add wings of fervor to our prayers so that they may

¹³ Thursday of the Third Week in Lent, Collect.

¹⁴ Saint Augustine Sermon 207.

¹⁵ Fourth Sunday of Lent, Collect.

¹⁶ Tuesday of the Fourth Week of Lent, Collect

¹⁷ Friday of the Fourth Week of Lent, Collect.

¹⁸ Friday after Ash Wednesday, Prayer over the People.

¹⁹ Friday after Ash Wednesday, Prayer over the Offerings.



more easily fly up and reach God,”²⁰ recalling the angel Raphael’s advice that “prayer with fasting is good.”²¹

The Ash Wednesday Liturgy describes these Lenten practices using a military metaphor, as a “campaign of Christian service,” by which we are “armed with weapons of self-restraint.”²²

These Lenten observances have two effects: they pardon our sins and “give us newness of life after the like of”²³ the risen Son of God.” Through them we come to the Paschal Mysteries with “minds made pure,”²⁴ for they help us to “grow in understanding of the riches hidden in Christ and by worthy conduct pursue their effects,”²⁵ making us “sharers of his divine nature.”²⁶

Fasting

Christ provides the model for fasting and consecrates its Lenten observance by his abstaining in the desert for forty days.²⁷

Saint John Chrysostom speaks of fasting as not what we have given up, but what we have gained. It “the food for the soul.” As bodily food makes the body fat, so fasting “makes the soul healthier and makes its wings light so that it may be borne aloft and be capable of contemplating what is above.”²⁸

²⁰ Saint Augustine, *Questions from Both Testaments*, 70.

²¹ Tobit 12:8.

²² Ash Wednesday, Collect.

²³ Ash Wednesday, Blessing of Ashes.

²⁴ Ash Wednesday, Blessing of Ashes.

²⁵ First Sunday of Lent, Collect.

²⁶ Saturday of the Fifth Week of Lent, Prayer after Communion.

²⁷ Cf. First Sunday of Lent, Preface.

²⁸ Saint John Chrysostom, *Homily on Genesis*, 1, 4.



Thus, in the words of the Lenten Liturgy “by moderating earthly desires we...learn to love the things of heaven.”²⁹

True fasting, Pope Saint Leo reminds us, like almsgiving, “makes us merciful, moving our spirit to turn away from injustice and [our] tongue [to] abstain from quarreling.”³⁰



Each of Pope Saint Leo’s twelve sermons on Lent are centered on the theme of forgiveness as the foundational disciplinary practice of Lent, the “powerful remedy and most efficacious means of healing our own wounds.”³¹ Such mercy is nothing less than a participation in the mercy which God has shown to us from the altar of the Cross.³²

In Pope Saint Leo’s time, Emperors followed the practice of releasing prisoners during Lent. Thus does he recommend this practice to every Christian, in fulfillment of the words they pray three times every day, “forgive us our trespasses, **as** we forgive those who trespass against us.” If we fail to act according to the words which we pray, we will “fasten heavy chains upon ourselves.”³³

Therefore let the Christian peoples...be spurred by the royal example to a domestic clemency. The laws that govern private life should not be more severe than those that govern public life. Forgive sins, break fetters, wipe out offenses, and eliminate vengefulness so that the sacred feast may be marked by pardon human and divine, and thus find everyone joyous and beyond reproach.³⁴

²⁹ Tuesday of the First Week of Lent, Prayer after Communion.

³⁰ Saint Augustine, Sermon 42, 2.

³¹ Saint Augustine, Sermon 39.

³² Cf. Saint Augustine, Sermon 50, 3. Sermo 50, 3

³³ Saint Augustine, Sermon 43, 4.

³⁴ Saint Augustine, Sermon 40, 5.

Almsgiving

Thus does Saint Augustine see almsgiving as a natural consequence of the mercy which lets go of anger and “expels from the heart that which it is more harmful to keep than to give away.”³⁵



As one of the two wings which bear our prayers to heaven, almsgiving is a participation in the generosity of our creator. In the words of Pope Saint Leo:

No zeal on the part of the faithful gives greater joy to God than that which is devoted to his poor. Where he finds a concern for mercy, he sees his own love imaged forth on man.³⁶

Thus does the Church pray in her Lenten Liturgy that we

...may we walk eagerly in that same charity with which, out of love for the world, your Son handed himself over to death.³⁷

Even Catechumens are called to join the faithful in acts of fasting and almsgiving, by they “receive what they do not have as yet,” while the faithful who accompany them on this Lenten journey polish “the mirrors of their hearts with greater care.”³⁸

³⁵ Saint Augustine, Sermon 208, 2.

³⁶ Saint Augustine, Sermon 48, 5.

³⁷ Fifth Sunday of Lent, Collect.

³⁸ Saint Augustine, Sermon 43, 3.

Repentance

From the earliest days of the Church, Lent has been the time to confess our sins and seek forgiveness from the God who delights in innocence and seeks ever to restore it.³⁹ Repeatedly, the Liturgy urges God's faithful to "weep, as [you] should, for the evil [you] have done, and so merit the grace of your consolation." Thus we pray:

"Convert us, O God our Savior,
and instruct our minds by heavenly teaching,
that we may benefit from the works of Lent."⁴⁰

Lent then, is a great gift to every member of the Church. For God, the "author of every mercy and of all goodness...in fasting, prayer and almsgiving [has] shown us a remedy for sin"⁴¹ that we might know "a joyful purity of heart."⁴²



³⁹ Thursday of the Second Week of Lent, Collect.

⁴⁰ Monday of the First Week of Lent, Collect.

⁴¹ Third Sunday of Lent, Collect.

⁴² Monday of the Fifth Week of Lent, Prayer over the Offerings.

Diocesan Prayer for Eucharistic Revival



Lord Jesus Christ,
who by the gift of your Body and Blood,
are really present in our lives,
hear the prayers of the Church in Worcester.

Give us the faith of your Church, confident
in your presence in our Masses, our
tabernacles and our lives.

Give us the faith
to offer our lives to you,
joined with the perfect sacrifice,
which you offered on the altar of the Cross.

Good and loving Shepherd,
teach us how to lead your children home,
that we might long together
to glorify your name
at the Supper of the Lord.

For you are Lord, forever and ever. Amen.

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