



Journey
TO
Sainthood

LENT 2017

H.

An Introduction

“It is Jesus who stirs in you the desire to do something great with your lives, the will to follow an ideal, the refusal to allow yourselves to be ground down by mediocrity, the courage to commit yourselves humbly and patiently to improving yourselves and society, making the world more human and more fraternal.”

-- St. John Paul the Great

Hello Ladies! This Lent we are hoping that you walk with us on a journey to sainthood. It is our hope and desire that through these next few weeks that you dive deeper into the call the Lord has for you in your life. I recently had a conversation with a friend who was convinced that the call to sainthood is too great unless we are a consecrated religious or a priest, but this is false. The Lord calls each and everyone of us to become saints. He calls us to be saints who are mothers, sisters, daughters, and friends. Yes, some of us will be saints as consecrated religious or priests, but we want everyone to understand the calling that the Lord has given them. Use these next few weeks to say ‘Yes’ every morning to what the Lord is asking of you.

The first two weeks of the study will be diving deeper into our interior call to be saints, the next two weeks are our calling for us in our families, and the last two weeks dive deeper into the call we have out in the workplace and society to be saints.

The Lord is calling us to live in His love and dwell as closely as possible to Him even while we are still on this journey through Earth.

To Jesus Through Mary,

Mary Katherine

HK

We hope that you'll dive in, grow in the Lord, and share with others what beauty God reveals to you through it. If you are doing this study independently, know that we at HOM are here for you & that you also have a LARGE community of women through our website and social media that are participating too! You are truly never alone!

If you are completing this study in a group setting - we are excited that you have found a local community to grow with, on top of our online sisterhood. Please use this study journal for your reference, resource, and more during your meetings and the personal time leading up to it.

Looking for a group? Please visit www.heartofmarywf.com/groups to find a meet up near you.

Are you already in one but not listed on our website? Looking to start one? Please contact us for more information about our "HOM Ambassador" program. We have team members available specifically to help you grow a local group and lead other women through community, prayer, and devotion. Their support is available at all times. We also want to help you grow! We will advertise your group on our website & social media! And we have free resources for you as well. Please email us at heartofmarywf@aol.com

Note: All written content has been reviewed by a Catholic spiritual director to cross check that all statements align with the teachings and tenants of the Roman Catholic Church.

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Journey to Sainthood Writing Team



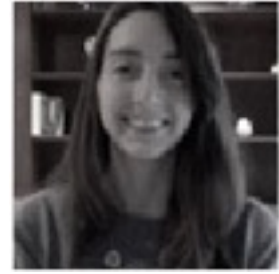
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Matthew 6:1-6 Matthew 6:16-18

This Lent, we at Heart of Mary Women's Fellowship are excited to start a "*Journey to Sainthood*" with each of you.

When I was a little girl, I used to look at some of the older members of our church who went to daily mass and spent time in adoration, and I thought, "When I am old like them, I am going to have so much time to spend with Jesus!" It makes me laugh now when I think of it because for some reason my childish mind thought that my relationship with God was something that could wait until I was older and "had the time." Well, let me tell you ladies, now is that time to renew and strengthen your relationship with the Lord! The Lord is calling each and every one of us to be saints, exactly where we are in our lives. He is calling us to be saints whether we are mothers, daughters, sisters, wives, and in any other vocation or situation we are in.

One of my biggest struggles is that I look at the lives of the saints and think that they are so much holier than I am (they totally are!), and I really get discouraged by this. There are saints who go weeks without eating and live only off of the Eucharist, saints who bring thousands of souls to the Lord, and saints who give their entire lives for the Lord. It is so hard not to look at the stories of the lives of saints and not get discouraged, but I heard some great advice one day as I was listening to a priest's homily. He said that the stories of saints that we read and hear about are really only their "Facebook" or "Instagram" pages. He said that we are only seeing snapshots of their lives, and that they most likely experienced a lot of the monotony and routine that we experience in our daily lives. Have hope! I want you to believe that the Lord is calling you to be a saint and that you can achieve

it! The more lowly we are, the more of an opportunity we are giving the Lord to work great miracles in our lives.

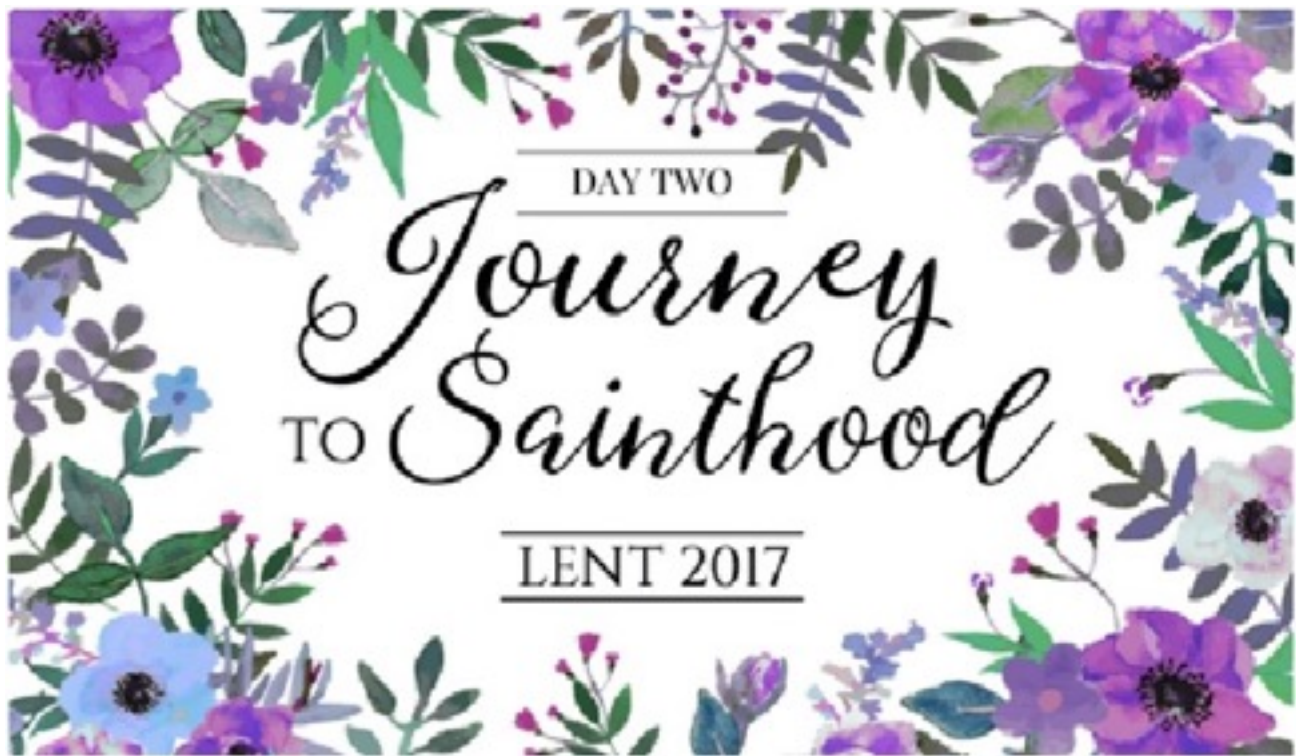
Finally, I would like to walk you through how this journey will be set up through Lent. Every two weeks there will be another "level" or area of ourselves that we are going to look at. The first two weeks we are going to look at how the Lord is calling us interiorly to be saints. The second two weeks will be our call to sainthood in our families. The last two weeks will be our call to sainthood in our daily lives and in the world. At the end of each day's study there will be a set of prayers that you are invited to pray and petition for the Lord's help and guidance on your journey. I want you to know that you are being prayed for each day and that we hope that through this study you are able to fully understand how the Lord is calling you to be a saint.-*Marykatherine*

Prayer for Holiness

Breathe in me, O Holy Spirit, that my thoughts may all be holy.
Act in me, O Holy Spirit, that my work, too, may be holy.
Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit, that I love only what is holy.
Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit, to defend all that is holy.
Guard me so, O Holy Spirit, that I may always be holy.
Amen.

Peace of Heart

Almighty and Eternal God,
Give me, I beseech You,
the great gift of inward peace.
Command the winds and storms
of my unruly passions.
Subdue, by Your grace,
my proneness to love
created things too much.
Give me a love of suffering for Your sake.
make me forbearing and kind to others,
that I may avoid quarrels and contentions.
And teach me constantly to seek after
and to acquire that perfect resignation
to Your Holy Will
which alone brings interior peace. Amen.



[Luke 9:23-25](#)

Recently my sister and I were having a discussion about how our culture has changed into a “you deserve this” culture. As in, “you’ve had a hard day, you deserve this drink” or “you did a great job, here’s a reward” and of course “but they are such good people, they don’t deserve this.” We do it without noticing it, we feel that we deserve the same things, the same lives, the same blessings as everyone else because that’s what would make us happy, and God is all about us being happy, right?

Well right, and wrong.

See the problem with us gauging what we deserve and don’t deserve is that it doesn’t leave room for God and what he chooses for us. Whether we feel like those things are things we deserve or not.

Let’s talk a minute about what we deserve. My sister, the same one with who I had this conversation, is a mother to four beautiful children, one of whom is severely disabled. My niece suffers from a neurological disorder. She is four years old and has never talked, walked, held her head up, or stood independently. She is riddled with seizures, endures numerous medical procedures, medications and is constantly fighting against the next virus or bacteria that will put her fragile body into the hospital.

Is this fair? Does she deserve this? Has she done anything in her short life that’s warranted a life that will be spent in a wheelchair, never able to run around like a typical four year old? No. The answer is no. It isn’t fair, and no she doesn’t deserve it. But God is present, He’s still there, He’s present and unfailing.

As Christians we are called to carry crosses, much like Jesus did to Calvary. All crosses look different, feel different and at some points have different weights. Some are physical, some are emotional, some spiritual. All are hard at times. Because of the weight of original sin no one gets to go through life without a cross to bear.

In Luke 9:23 Jesus says "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." Deny himself. Those are Jesus' words. Deny ourselves of what we think we deserve, of what we think we should have from life, and live the life that He wants us to live.

Although they can sometimes seem to bear too much weight, our crosses are never without reward. We are rewarded with eternal happiness, with eternal life with Christ. We are not asked to walk a life of hardship, of difficulty, of pain alone. We are never told to bear those experiences without the love, the truth and the way of the Lord.

My niece is four and unable to speak. Her cross is a physical one, one that inhibits her from saying what's on her mind- but the love of the Lord, and the power of the Holy Spirit allows her to light up a room, and let me tell you, does she shine! Anyone who has met her falls in love with her. Her smile, her eyes, her small coos make more people stop and listen than I have ever seen. She was given a cross, a heavy one, but with that cross came something so special, the ability to let others see the innocence, the beauty of God's creation.

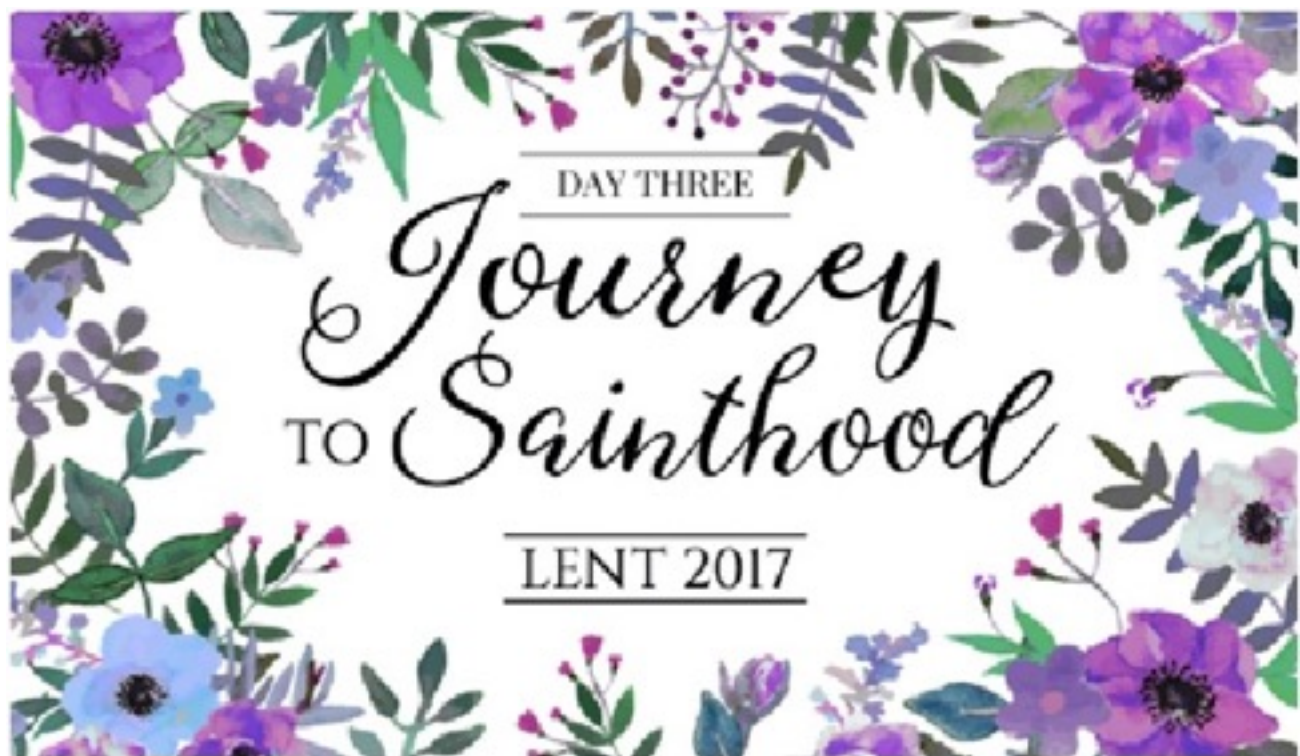
In a life following Jesus, there will be hardships, there will be pain. There will occasionally be times that we must deny ourselves and the things that we desire and in turn go towards what Jesus wants and what he desires for us. We are called to do this, but that doesn't make it easy.

Look to what Christ is calling you to do, where He's leading your life. Ask for guidance, ask for the courage to take up your cross and know that it's a journey you will never have to make alone.

-Dana

Reflect: We talked a lot about crosses to bear- what is your cross to bear? Have you ever stopped to wonder what life would be like without that cross? In what ways does it make you stronger and bring you closer to Christ?

Act: Today, I ask you to pray for courage. Courage to bear your cross, courage to ask for help when needed and the courage to help others with their journey to Christ. When you come across someone struggling with their cross- be sure to pray for them. Make yourself available to someone you know is struggling with something in their life.



[Matthew 9:14-15](#) [Matthew 4:2-4](#)

I'm one of two practicing Catholic in my office. This is never more evident to me, than on Ash Wednesday, and EVERY SINGLE FRIDAY in Lent. On Ash Wednesday, of course, I leave for a little bit of a longer lunch break, and come back with "something on your forehead, Mandi," and on Fridays, when everyone's trying to figure out where to go for lunch, I'm trying to figure out what I can order from wherever the group seems to be deciding on. When someone suggests somewhere I have NO chance of finding something small, healthy, and meat-free, I typically mention that I'm fine and opt out of the group lunch. As hard as it is to opt out of the social aspect of going to lunch with your colleagues, Fridays in Lent are a time for Fasting.

From the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops website: "Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are obligatory days of fasting and abstinence for Catholics. In addition, Fridays during Lent are obligatory days of abstinence." Fasting is one way in which we become closer to our Lord, and closer to each other and the Body of the Church. Our Lord fasted for 40 days in the desert, and was tempted by the Devil, himself, during His time in the desert. Matthew 4: 2-4 tells us that, "After fasting forty days and forty nights, He was hungry. The tempter came to Him and said, 'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.' Jesus answered, 'It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

The Lord gave us the finest example of fasting, and when the Apostles asked Him about feasting and fasting, He basically tells them there's a time and place for everything. The time for feasting was for when Christ was here with the Apostles, and their time for fasting came after he left. He tells us there's a time and place and reason for everything we do. We fast on Fridays specifically because Church Tradition tells us that's the day of the week on which the Lord died. We fast on Ash



[Matthew 25:35-40](#)

A real moment of spiritual maturity for me was realizing that I could find Jesus each and every day, if only I cared enough to seek Him out. Of course, He would sometimes make Himself known in significant ways, but other days, most days, His gentle spirit would be waiting for me in the most ordinary ways. This Lent, we are looking at the path to sainthood. The awesome thing is that we are able to advance on that journey all the time!

To grow in holiness is to simply work on being your best self each and every day. This is wise, since we do not know the time when Jesus will return. During his homily, the priest once asked our congregation what wrongs they would right if they had only one hour until Christ's return. That sparked a conversation between my husband and I on study and service. Were we doing enough to advance God's kingdom? Matthew 25 says that when Jesus comes again He will divide those living into two groups: the righteous and the others (33). Spoiler alert: the "others" are immediately sent off to eternal punishment (46). Since we did not want to be in the "others" category, we started taking steps to take Jesus' invitation into our hearts more seriously than we had been.

Contrary to popular belief, Jesus invites us to open our hearts to Him all the time. This invitation is not exclusive to the sacraments or to mass. Our loving God wants us to grow in our faith every day and provides us with the opportunities to do so! In fact, we are given a myriad of examples in Matthew 25:35-40.

"I was hungry and you fed me, thirsty and you gave me a drink; I was a stranger and you received me in your homes, naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you took care of me, in prison and you visited me." The righteous will then answer him, "When, Lord, did we ever see you hungry and



[Luke 11:29-32](#)

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.

Hebrews 11:1

Growing up I remember hearing people give their testimonies at church. Often it would involve a special moment in which that person had a revelation that God was real, that he loved him, and that Jesus was his son who died to save them. I guess I often felt left out because I never had that "moment". As far back as I could remember I had always believed in God. It isn't that I never questioned or doubted, but there was never anything that shook my faith that God was real. It is only as I have grown older and watched others fall away from belief that I recognize what a gift my lifelong faith has been.

I've been reading a book called *Walking with Purpose* by Dynamic Catholic. In the first section of the book it discusses three main motivations that people do things. One of these motivations resonated with me, and that was pride. People, like me, who are motivated by pride, are driven to achieve goals, gain praise, and like to control things. What struck me most was that according to the book the opposite of pride is faith.

So while I may profess with my mouth and mind and heart that I believe in God, faith is so much more than simply believing that he exists. Sometimes (okay, often) I don't let my faith permeate all aspects of my life. Do I trust that God will help my family in the midst of medical strife, unemployment, uncertainty? Or do I try to control everything myself, putting all faith in myself?



Matthew 7:7-12

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”

On today's journey I encourage you ladies to ask the Lord for this one simple thing that we like to complicate at times: a deeper relationship with Jesus. I don't know about you, but whenever I hear “ask and it will be given to you” in the Bible I immediately start to picture all of the lovely things that the Lord could give me in my life. I think about asking Him for more success in my job and relationship, a deeper sense of security financially, and so on and so on. If I am feeling particularly pious on that day I will MAYBE think about asking the Lord for a deeper relationship with Him, but this is definitely not always the case.

On most days I really cannot get past my own immediate and selfish needs in order to really reflect and ask for a deeper relationship with the Lord, but this is what He wants! The Lord desires above all else to have a deeper relationship with Him. When He is telling us to ask, seek, and knock, He is telling us to do those things in order to come closer to Him! One way that I have been able to grow in deeper relationship with the Lord is by recognizing the small gestures of love that He pours out on me every day. The Lord has shown His love for much through the kind words of a friend, a small note of encouragement left in my mailbox, donuts on a particularly crabby morning, and in so many other ways. It is through these small gestures of love that I have been able to piece together how much the Lord actually loves me and I know that my understanding of His love is but a drop in the ocean compared to how much He actually loves me; to how much He actually loves each and every one of you!

Today on your journey to sainthood I think it is important to stop and reflect on your relationship with the Lord. Is it a deep friendship built on love and trust or is the Lord just there to listen to you when something is not going your way? If it is the latter then I encourage you to ask the Lord for a deeper relationship! He is always waiting behind that door for you to knock and the love that is waiting for you is more than you could ever imagine.

“If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to those who ask him.”

-Marykatherine

Prayer for Holiness

Breathe in me, O Holy Spirit, that my thoughts may all be holy.

Act in me, O Holy Spirit, that my work, too, may be holy.

Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit, that I love only what is holy.

Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit, to defend all that is holy.

Guard me so, O Holy Spirit, that I may always be holy.

Amen.

Peace of Heart

Almighty and Eternal God,

Give me, I beseech You,

the great gift of inward peace.

Command the winds and storms

of my unruly passions.

Subdue, by Your grace,

my proneness to love

created things too much.

Give me a love of suffering for Your sake.

make me forbearing and kind to others,

that I may avoid quarrels and contentions.



[Matthew 23:12](#) [2 Corinthians 12:7-10](#)

What exactly comes to mind when you think of “righteousness,” especially interior righteousness? Some synonyms that I found for “righteousness” include words such as justice and honor. There are many ways that righteousness can be shown on the outside, but how exactly can we practice the idea of interior righteousness?

When I think of “interior righteousness,” I think of people who live contemplative lives. One person that comes to mind is St. Teresa of Avila. She started out as a spoiled, pampered woman from a wealthy family. Her lavish lifestyle continued even after she became a nun. However, when she started learning more about what contemplative life consisted of, she felt God pulling her towards Him.

In her autobiography, she said “The soul is satisfied now with nothing less than God.” God inevitably worked His way into Teresa’s life and as a result of this change, Teresa began to reform the Carmelite order and became a great and prolific writer, especially about the contemplative life and spirituality.

In her book *Interior Castle*, St. Teresa of Avila compared the soul to a castle made out of a single diamond with many rooms. She later goes on to say: “We shall never learn to know ourselves except by endeavoring to know God.” By knowing God, we begin to see ourselves the way that God sees us.

How do we begin to see ourselves the way God sees us? By practicing the virtue of humility. St. Teresa of Avila said, "As I see it, we shall never succeed in knowing ourselves unless we seek to know God: let us think of His greatness and then come back to our own baseness; by looking at His purity we shall see our foulness; by meditating upon His humility, we shall see how far we are from being humble." It is through humility that we learn how to love beyond how the world defines it. "Love consists, not in the extent of our happiness, but in the firmness of our determination to try to please God in everything, and to endeavor, in all possible ways..."

St. Teresa of Avila couldn't reform an entire order without first reforming herself. If we want to be the kind of people who want to see righteousness done in the world, we have to begin with practicing righteousness in ourselves by being humble. *-Monique*

Reflect: Reflect on the quotes from St. Teresa of Avila. Which one stands out to you the most? How do you think humility ties into the idea of interior righteousness?

Act: Pray the Litany of Humility and see what act of kindness you can do that doesn't draw attention to yourself.



[Matthew 5:43-48](#)

I am a full blown perfectionist, ever since I can remember. Not just in schoolwork, or in my job, but in my marriage and relationships, and especially in living the Christian life. I used to think that God would only love me if I followed His way perfectly, if I didn't break any of the "rules" and followed His will in everything. It's only recently that God has started to heal me from that bondage and show me that it cripples my soul more than it helps. Which is why the Gospel verse today has always tripped me up. God tells us to be perfect! So what's the problem? The problem is that's not what God really said.

First of all, He tells us to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect. It is Christ who lives in us in His divine perfection, not our own. We are called to let His perfect love work through us even in our brokenness and sin. Because no human being is perfect (except for for one, and none of us are her!). Christ is telling us in this passage that we are called to surrender and let the Father's perfection mold us, shape us, and work through us... not to be perfect on our own.

But secondly, and more importantly, the Bible wasn't written in English. After doing some research for this study, I discovered that the Greek word used in this passage that we imperfectly translate as "perfect" is the the word telios. It "refers to something being completed, brought to its full purpose, potential and intended end and vocation."

A car is most telios when it is being driven from one destination to another. A chair is most telios when someone is sitting in it. And we, as human beings are most telios when we love as God loves. Go back and read the preceding lines of this passage - Christ is teaching that we are only complete and made

Lent 2017

whole when we love radically, including loving our enemies and those who don't love us back. We are brought to our fullest potential when we pray for those who persecute us (or break our hearts or misunderstand us or judge us). We are most human when we love. Meaning anything that causes us to turn away from this type of love - such as our own hurt, selfishness, or sin - actually makes us less human. It takes away from our telios.

So interior perfection doesn't mean following all the rules perfectly, it means growing in love. It doesn't mean that we can't ever mess up, but that we can't ever stop loving. Christ never stopped loving, even on the Cross. He prayed for those who were persecuting Him, telling the Father that they "know not what they do." He is our model, leading us to wholeness. The rules of the Christian life are simply there to help guide us and safeguard this way of love. They can't become a stumbling block to love, as St. Paul understood - "And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing." (1 Cor 13:2) We are nothing without love. It is what we were created to do.

But the only way to get this interior perfection, this interior wholeness of love, is by letting Love Himself mold us. We can't try to do it or obtain it on our own, lest it become another occasion of perfectionism and self-reliance. Let Christ's love shape your own heart, and the rest will flow naturally. Let it fill you up to the brim so that it has to overflow onto those around you. Even if you are broken... that's the only way the love gets out.

Are there people in your life that you could do a better job loving with Christ's love? Are there people you could pray for who have persecuted you? Lent is the perfect opportunity to take stock of our hearts and seek the transformation He wants to bestow on us. You only have to ask. And then watch as true peace, true wholesome shalom, fills your heart. *Emily*

Prayer for Holiness

Breathe in me, O Holy Spirit, that my thoughts may all be holy. Act in me, O Holy Spirit, that my work, too, may be holy. Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit, that I love only what is holy.

Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit, to defend all that is holy. Guard me so, O Holy Spirit, that I may always be holy. Amen.

Prayer for Peace of Heart

Almighty and Eternal God, Give me, I beseech You, the great gift of inward peace.

Command the winds and storms of my unruly passions. Subdue, by Your grace, my proneness to love created things too much. Give me a love of suffering for Your sake. make me forbearing and kind to others, that I may avoid quarrels and contentions. And teach me constantly to seek after and to acquire that perfect resignation to Your Holy Will which alone brings interior peace. Amen.



[Luke 6:36-38](#) [Genesis 1:27](#)

I think for a lot of people, it is either easy to feel God's mercy or extremely challenging. We have plenty of examples throughout the bible and from saints and people in general, of how merciful He is. However, sometimes when it comes to yourself feeling mercy from God, you may feel unworthy or that your sin(s) are just too huge for forgiveness.

My sisters, our God is truly a merciful God. He can forgive even the greatest sin imaginable, if only we repent. The angels dance when we go to confession! It is a beautiful thing. If you still feel uneasy about your sins after confession, keep praying to feel the mercy from God. I admit I have gone to confession after confessing the same sin (but only committing it once) over seven times. I struggle to feel mercy from God for that particular sin. It was committed long ago but the guilt remains. I know God has mercy, I believe He does but sometimes it takes longer to feel it, but keep praying and He will grant you mercy and peace!

St. Faustina and St. Therese the Little Flower are both wonderful saints that have a wealth of knowledge on God's mercy. St. Therese uses her "little way" to emphasize God's mercy towards all sinners. The book *33 Days to Merciful Love* goes in depth on this as another way to consecrate yourself to Jesus through his Divine Mercy (I highly recommend it, even if you're not sure about consecration, because it's still a powerful tool to learn about God's mercy as a general read) and can help those struggling with feeling God's mercy for sins that are just "too huge". St. Faustina is one of the pioneers in spreading the devotion of Divine Mercy! From her diary, Jesus said: "I have opened My Heart as a living fountain of mercy. Let all souls draw life from it. Let them approach this

sea of mercy with great trust. Sinners will attain justification, and the just will be confirmed in good. Whoever places his trust in My mercy will be filled with My divine peace at the hour of death" (Diary, 1520). Jesus wants us to know how merciful He is! He has said "the bigger the sinner, the bigger the right they have to my mercy". Let us be filled with the joy of such a merciful and loving God!

Looking to the bible, God shows His mercy from the Old Testament to the New Testament, it is never-ending. Not only is God merciful to us, but we are called to be merciful to others in turn. After all, going back to the beginning of creation in Genesis 1:27 it says: "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." It is only right that we show the mercy He shows to us, to others. In the gospel of Luke 6:36-38, he writes "Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." It is clear God wants us to resemble Him and treat others as we would wish to be treated. God gives us mercy, but also expects it in return.

Thank you Lord for being so merciful towards your people! - Ally

Reflect- Do you struggle with God's mercy? Why or why not? Pray for those who struggle with feeling the mercy of God!

Act - Go to confession and feel God's mercy present in your heart and, if you can, read the Diary of St. Faustina or sign up for the daily emails where you get just a tidbit of information each day! You can sign up at www.thedivinemercy.org (it's free) :) Also, consider making the consecration to the Divine Mercy with the 33 Days of Merciful Love book or just reading it for more information on God's mercy :)



[Matthew 23:12](#)

Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; but whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

I have always loved the Joyful Mysteries of the Rosary. There is something about praying them that truly makes me feel joyful. When I'm praying, I like to reflect on the virtue of each one. The first Joyful mystery is the Annunciation, in which the angel Gabriel tells Mary that she is to become pregnant with Jesus. The virtue for that mystery is humility.

Humility isn't just shrugging off a compliment or being modest. Humility, it seems to me, is more about understanding who God is and trusting that He is enough for us. In saying "yes" to God, Mary recognized that no matter what struggles she was going to face, God was in control and that the worldly comforts and achievements of this life aren't more worthwhile than following God.

If there was anyone who deserved to blaze through their time on this Earth with glory and praise, it's Jesus. But another of my favorite rosary mysteries, The Nativity, reminds me just how serious God takes humility. Born in humble circumstances, Jesus begins and ends his life in humility, as Philippians 2:8 says "Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

Christ's teaching on humility in **Matthew 23:12 is challenging for me:** "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; but whoever humbles himself will be exalted." I am a complete and total people pleaser. I also have been. Teacher's pet? This girl. Wants to win every award and be the best at everything? That's me. My desire to lift myself up means that I am neglecting to lift Christ up. I am relying on my own ability and not the trust and care of the Lord. And trust me, those who exalt themselves, do indeed, eventually get humbled.



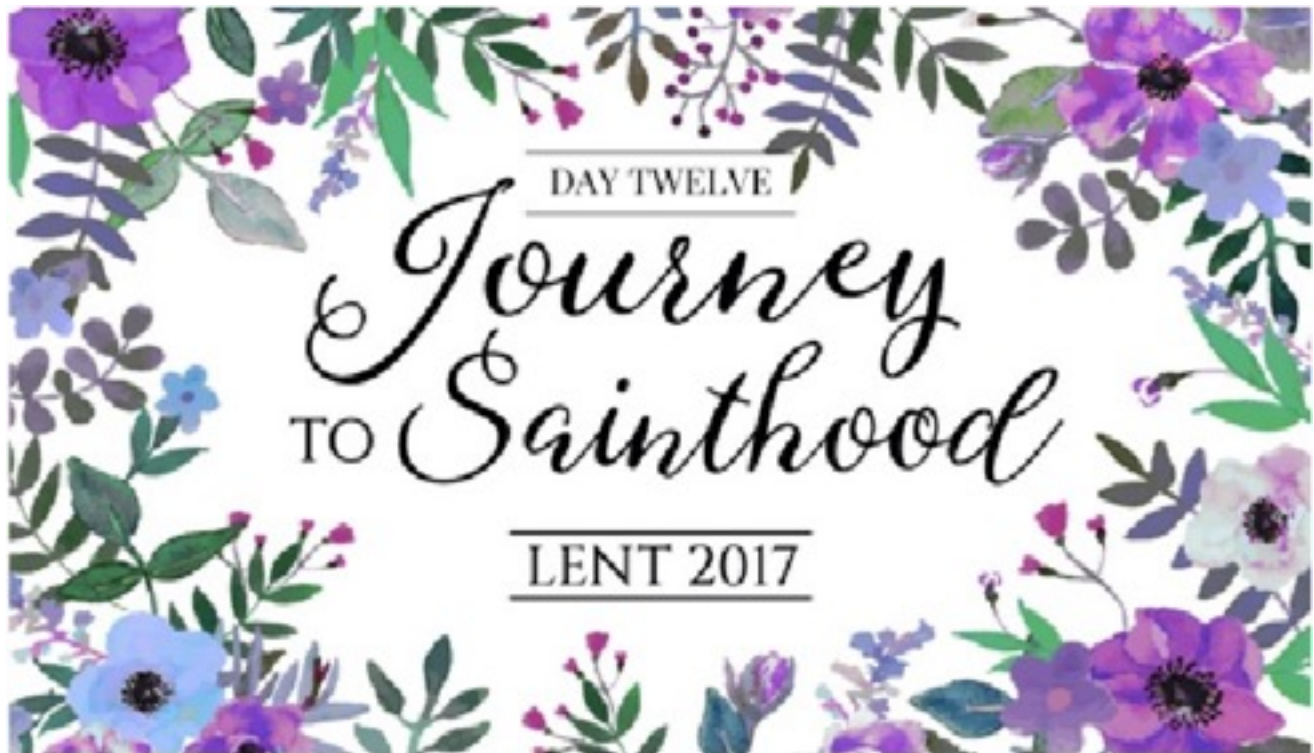
[Matthew 20:17-28](#)

"Just so, the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Last Advent, I was fortunate to attend a three-day lecture on stewardship, delivered by Fr. Rafael Partida of the San Bernardino Diocese. My expectation was a monologue filled with different responsibilities requested of me as a faithful Catholic. I would argue that indeed I was given a list, however it was not what I was expecting. Fr. Rafael Partida presented three items needed to remember and believe in order to build our relationship with Jesus, in turn fulfilling our responsibility as stewards.

Fr. Partida stated "because God only loves you, that is what makes you beautiful." Our personal identity lies squarely in the fact that God loves us. We are stewards of our own being because of that love. There remains complete freedom from anxiety and distress when this is realized. He further said that in our loneliness we find the best time to be with God, in that we literally get alone time with Him. We as servants need always remember that He saved us because He loves us and we can always communicate with Him because He is always there.

Because we are so loved by God, we have a responsibility to gift others that love; almost like a pay it forward campaign. We were reminded that we are a gift to our spouse, and the church, a gift to our family, but also a gift to our enemy. I have a responsibility to try and get my husband to heaven, help him to overcome sin, and also overcome my sinning that puts him in any poor position (and vice versa). It's an awesome responsibility and extraordinary compliment. Reflect for a moment on the fact that you are a gift to the world...



[Luke 16:19-31](#)

Having spent time as a missionary in Haiti, I've seen poverty up close and personal. I've held children whose swollen bellies are crying out in hunger. I've rubbed ointment on the scabies sores of an elderly woman who lived alone. I've been covered in the same dust that sticks to your sweaty skin when you travel anywhere. I've served in a cramped hospital in the stifled city air, and at an orphanage in the wide open mountains dotted with huts. I've fallen in the mud after it rains and felt the earth move beneath my feet. But I've also laughed. Oh, how I laughed. And rejoiced in blessings and cried in frustration and felt the rawness of human life and loved without measure.

The rich man literally had to step over Lazarus every time he left his house.

What would my life have looked like if I stepped over the poor?

What would my soul look like?

God unexpectedly called me back home to serve my physical neighbors, and it was one of the hardest things I've ever had to do. Because once you've touched the poor, especially the poorest of the poor, doing anything else seems like simply stepping over them. The home that God called me back to is one of the wealthiest nations on earth, and I am surrounded by the rich man everywhere I look. At first I felt so angry, wanting to scream at the top of my lungs that if we all just shared what we have, no one

would have to go to bed hungry or die of a curable disease. But this anger can quickly turn to apathy, and unfortunately has from time to time, if I'm not careful. Material goods can numb you if you're around them long enough.

One of the virtues of the soul is interior poverty. On the surface, it means having a detachment from material goods. It's one thing to choose to live simply, but if you still desire the things you are lacking then your heart is not fully detached. St. Francis himself, the king of poverty, would still struggle sometimes with this detachment. Taking it a level deeper, interior poverty is a detachment from anything else we love more than God or takes our attention away from Him - we can binge on Netflix or Facebook the same way we can binge on food or shopping. And at it's deepest level, interior poverty is the recognition that our souls are nothing without God. We are all poor in this sense.

Jesus lived this total, deep detachment on all levels. He was born in a humble manger, lived a simple life, and only desired what the Father wanted. This in turn freed him to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, and heal the sick. He became poor so that we could become rich (2 Cor 8:9). You can't have true interior poverty without also being sensitive to the outward poverty surrounding you.

The biggest lesson God has shown me is that I can find my Lazarus anywhere, can see Him disguised in anyone. While we still have our physically poor in the States, we also have those suffering mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. These can be your own family members, those in your parish or workplace, or the homeless man on the side of the road. Mother Teresa said that the first world countries are in one sense poorer than the physically poor nations, because we thirst for love and hunger for God. This hunger is harder to remove than the hunger for bread. Sometimes it's just easier to step over, especially if you feel worn out yourself. But imagine a society where we all bent down?

So instead of letting myself become numb again to the plight of the Lazarus at my gate, I will not step over. I will choose to love - to give an encouraging smile, a listening shoulder, or a helpful hand to those around me. I will "live simply so that others may simply live." Lent is a perfect time to grow in both interior poverty and the works of mercy, by practicing fasting and almsgiving. These two practices, combined with prayer, help us to recognize the Lazarus at our gate and stoop down to encounter him. I promise your life will never be the same. -Emily

Prayer for Holiness

Breathe in me, O Holy Spirit, that my thoughts may all be holy.
Act in me, O Holy Spirit, that my work, too, may be holy.
Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit, that I love only what is holy.
Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit, to defend all that is holy.
Guard me so, O Holy Spirit, that I may always be holy.
Amen.

Prayer for Peace of Heart

Almighty and Eternal God,
Give me, I beseech You,



[Matthew 21:33-46](#)

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you." Jeremiah 1:5

Our minds cannot comprehend how special each soul is to God. We do not understand the dignity that is ours when His Goodness chose each one of us to live, to think, to know, to see, to love...Out of possible billions of human beings that might have existed in God's mind—His Eye rested on each one of us and then stopped looking and said, "You shall be"

-Mother Angelica

While not an instinctive reaction, Jesus' parable of the Wicked Tenants in Matthew 21:33-46 is a deep examination into our very souls. Even though the thought causes us to recoil in denial and shame, we surely would never kill another over our desire for their goods. Yet, how often do we allow the blessings of God for another cause us lust, inordinate desire, fear, jealousy and insecurity? As women it can be so second nature to long to be more beautiful, look down (even if in thought only) at the women around us; feeling as though we don't measure up.

Whatever the match was that lit the anger and rage in the tenants within the parable, it is never clarified, nor is it truly important. What is key is that they lost their way. They failed to see how richly blessed they themselves were. They were given a multitude of blessings and graces in order to be the keepers of a grand estate, a heavenly treasure. Instead, the tenants squandered what had been given to them. Out of greed and selfishness they lacked a humble self-love and ultimately failed to love God the Father with their whole souls.

Lent 2017



[Matthew 1:16](#) [Matthew 18-21](#) [Matthew 24A](#)

I don't know if there was a particular moment where I determined my vocation to marriage and family life; it was something I always seemed to know. Not because I couldn't see the beauty in a religious life, but because I always had in my heart a desire to love and to give myself in love, in the context of a family.

Little did I know that I would be called into the chaos and joys of a missionary family. I knew my husband had heard the call to mission work around the time we began dating, but it wasn't until we were in the trenches of panicked parents, fundraising, and moving to Alabama, that I really began to understand that it wasn't just my husband the Lord was calling, but me as well. I wasn't the full-time missionary, but I quickly learned that I was also being sent. And for the first time, I understood how St Joseph probably felt, being called by the Lord by entering into a marriage.

Mary was called by God to be the mother of His Son, the Savior of the World. But Joseph was called too. "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus..." With these words, Joseph was called into mission with Mary. Not only that, but he was called to all of the difficulties and responsibilities that go along with it.

Before Mary had even lived with him as his wife, St. Joseph had to prepare for parenthood; he had to support not only his spouse but a child. He had to travel with his pregnant wife to Bethlehem, stand by her as she gave birth in a dirty animal stall, and flee to Egypt to protect the child the Lord had entrusted to him.

But Joseph's role in salvation history was not a mere coincidence. God didn't pick him simply because he was Mary's betrothed. God chose him. The Lord called St. Joseph as much as He chose Mary, and



[Matthew 18:21-35](#)

Forgiveness. I chose to write on this topic because it's one that's hard, no make that very hard for me. It's not something that I just fall in to naturally, at times, many times, I have to ask God for help when it comes to forgiving. You see, I'm a very emotional, very animated person. I love hard, I play hard, I do everything deeply. It's not always a bad thing, but when it comes to getting my feelings hurt, or being disappointed, I find that sometimes it's hard for me to let that pain go.

That's why when I had the opportunity to write about forgiveness, I took it. Not because I think I'm the most well versed on the topic, obviously I'm not, but because I think that it's something that a lot of people struggle with and are too afraid to admit it. No one wants to be the person that outwardly admits that they hold grudges, but I would guess that when push came to shove, many of us struggle with that urge. And that's okay, we are human. We make mistakes, we hold grudges, we yell, we hurt others, we disappoint, we do a lot of things we shouldn't do, but what's also okay, and extremely necessary, is forgiveness.

Now when I say I struggle with forgiveness, I'm mainly talking about forgiveness with one person-myself. I'm being real and honest when I say that I stayed away from the sacrament of reconciliation for almost three years because I was afraid of forgiveness. It was so hard for me to forgive myself for past mistakes, how could I dare ask God for his forgiveness? How could I dare go and ask for him to absolve my sins when I didn't feel worthy of absolution? That's when a priest told me something that will probably always change my outlook on confession and forgiveness- he told me, "You aren't special."

Before you think that statement is completely rude, let me explain. He told me I wasn't special in the fact that God forgives all sins that we are truly sorry for and ask to be forgiven. It's as simple as that. He meant that God doesn't just go "Oh, no...not her again, nope. Everyone else can have their sins forgiven but her." After he told me that the idea of confession, the idea of forgiveness was completely altered in my mind.

Forgiveness for us can be difficult because we love with human hearts, God loves with a God heart, and forgiveness for Him looks different, feels different. He wants nothing more than for us to come to Him for forgiveness and He wants nothing more than to forgive us for those sins. He wants His children to be close to Him. Every parent knows that feeling. Yes we stray, yes we make mistakes, but He wants us to be close to Him. He wants us. Always.

Ephesians 4:32 says "be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another as God has forgiven you in Christ." Be compassionate. Be willing to look past a rude comment, a hurtful situation and ask God not only for forgiveness for that person, but also for the ability to pray for those who hurt us. I for one know that when the scripture is read that we must pray for our enemies I always smile. Pray for your enemies, pray for those who hurt you, who mock you, you bring you down. Show compassion, forgiveness, turn the other cheek. Jesus asks us to do all of these things and yet we have human hearts to work with. We will struggle, we won't always find it easy, but we have to find it necessary.

Matthew 18:23 says "That is why the kingdom of Heaven may be likened to a king who decided to settle accounts with his servants." Forgiveness brings peace, lightens your heart, lightens the cross that you bear. Ask for forgiveness, practice forgiveness and keep praying that others may find it easier to do so as well. -Dana

Reflect: Think of someone who has hurt you- have you given that person total forgiveness? Which is harder for you, forgiving others, or forgiving yourself? Why do you think that is?

Act: Ask God to help you through the act of forgiveness- pray that you may look at the next indiscretion with more of a "God heart" and less of a "human heart."

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