

PRAYING LENT

From the *Online Ministries*, CREIGHTON UNIVERSITY

The Invitation of Lent.

Lent is a season of being invited by God in a deeply personal way. "Come back to me, with all of your heart," our Lord beckons. "We will," we respond, but we aren't quite ready yet, our hearts are not prepared. We want to squirm, evade, avoid. Our souls not yet perfect. We are not ready for God to love us.

Yes, of course we want to have a deeper relationship with God, we tell ourselves earnestly. And we will....Soon. God calls to us again: *Come back to me, with all of your heart.*

Ok, ok, I really will. Just a few more things to do at work. Let me spend a little more time in prayer first. Let me get to Reconciliation. Let me clean my oven, tidy my closets. Sell my yoke of oxen. Check a field I have purchased....

Come back to me, with all of your heart.



It is an extraordinary invitation to each one of us. To *me* in a personal, individual way. God invites me to drop the defenses that I hold up between myself and God. All God wants is for me to realize that *my* standards, my way of judging and loving are so very different from God's way, and so much smaller. God offers an

entire Lent season, an entire lifetime, of loving me unconditionally, no matter what I have done or how much I think I have hidden from God.

From the first day of Lent, the Ash Wednesday readings make God's call to us clear: "Return to me with your whole heart."

"A clean heart create for me, O God," Psalm 51 offers. "Give me back the joy of your salvation." That is exactly what our loving God wants to give us, the joy of salvation.

In North America, Lent falls in winter and these days are cold and dark, perfect for hiding ourselves indoors, perfect for hiding from God - or so we imagine. But our God is insistent, loving, gently prodding. God is the parent of the Prodigal Child, waiting faithfully, eagerly on the road for our return, night after night. There are no folded arms and stern judging stares, only the straining eyes of a parent eager for our return, longing to embrace us and rejoice in us.

Yet we spend so much time trying to think of *how* to return and what to say, how to begin the conversation. It's only when we finally appear after so much time away, embarrassed and confused, that we understand we don't have to say anything. We only have to show up.

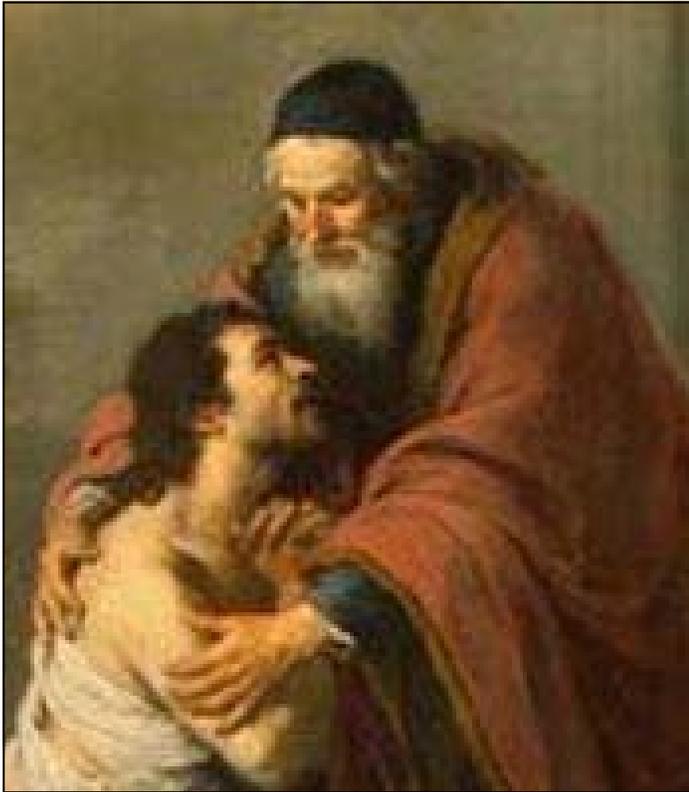
Look up there on the road ahead of us: our loving God is jumping up and down for joy. The

Visit the *Online Ministries* site: *Praying Lent*.

In addition to this resource for Lent, there are many others to support our journey through Lent. And, there is a **Lenten Daily Prayer** for each day of Lent.

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invitation to us has been heard. We have returned home!



But, wait... What stops us from this great reunion? What keeps us from accepting this invitation to something deeper in our lives with God? We feel in our hearts that there are things we should say first: “wait...but...if only” and finally, “If God really knew about me...”

It doesn't matter. None of it matters. Only the joy that we have turned to God and that like a loving father or mother, God is smothering us with embraces and joyful cries. We have returned!

Come back to me, with all of your heart.

Our acceptance of this call, this appeal to our hearts is simple if we can only get beyond the fear. All we have to do is say to our Lord, "I'm here. Where do I start? Yes, I want to be with you." Our hearts have been opened and we have taken the first step toward the rejoicing parent on the road. No explanations are necessary, only to pause and picture in our hearts the joyfully loving and unblinking gaze of God that falls on us.

What's the next step on our journey home? We could take the earliest moments of our day, before we have gotten out of bed to thank God for such a loving invitation and ask for help in opening our hearts to it. We could remember throughout the day the invitation that has moved our hearts: *Come back to me, with all of your heart.* And we can rejoice along with God.

That is the invitation of each day of Lent. Today is the day to accept it.

Psalm 95

1
Come, let us sing joyfully to the LORD;
cry out to the rock of our salvation.

2
Let us greet him with a song of praise,
joyfully sing out our psalms.

3
For the LORD is the great God,
the great king over all gods,

4
Whose hand holds the depths of the earth;
who owns the tops of the mountains.

5
The sea and dry land belong to God,
who made them, formed them by hand.

6
Enter, let us bow down in worship;
let us kneel before the LORD who made us.

7
For this is our God, whose people we are,
God's well-tended flock.

Oh, that today you would hear his voice.

The New American Bible