

“This is the time of fulfillment.  
The kingdom of God is at hand.  
Repent, and believe in the gospel.”

## Guide for Prayer for the First Week of Lent: March 5-11, 2006

### The First Week of Lent

On the **First Sunday of Lent**, as we begin our Lenten journey, remembering how God re-established the covenant, after the flood, and we reflect on how Jesus began his public ministry with a retreat of forty days - driven to the desert by the Spirit.

After the first four days, the next three weeks of Lent represent a period of instruction, originally designed for the Catechumens (those preparing for Baptism at the Easter Vigil). We can read these readings as a catechism of renewal for us all.

The first reading of week one is the great giving of the Commandments: "Be holy, for I, the LORD, your God, am holy." Jesus gives the great parable about the last judgment - separating the charitable from the uncharitable: "whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me." Then, Jesus teaches his disciples to pray. He says that it is an evil generation that looks for "signs." He's the sign - a call to repentance. On the day we hear the desperate but faith-filled prayer of **Esther**, Jesus tells us to pray confidently. And he sums up the whole law and the prophets for us: "Do to others whatever you would have them do to you." Jesus says our holiness has to go beyond the letter-of-the-law holiness; it must touch our anger, our judgments of others, and be reconciled with those we've wronged. The holiness Jesus proposes for us calls us to love our enemies, even to pray for those who persecute us. We are called to love the way God does.

For the **Second Sunday of Lent** we read of how God tested Abraham's faith. In the gospel we witness how Jesus showed his disciples his glory, to prepare them for what is to come. A voice from a cloud said, "This is my Son, my beloved. Listen to him." All we need to do for the journey ahead is to listen to him.

### Daily Prayer This Week

This first week of Lent is the time we are given to begin our Lenten patterns, to re-align our priorities, and to make use of more reflective time each day. It is a time to fast and abstain from those things that hinder our relationship with the Lord, and to consider being more generous to the poor.

As we make this beginning, we are offered some beautiful instruction about what is expected of us. These readings describe a very Jesus-like love. We can examine our care for the hungry, thirsty, naked, sick or imprisoned. We can reflect upon who in our lives needs us and whether we love them as we want to be loved. And we can look at the deeper things, like our anger or how we treat others, and our response to those who are our "enemies." What is most important this first week, beyond a sharper examination of our consciences, is to see this as a time for God's grace to work in us. So, it is a time to ask for the graces we are starting to see we need.

Each morning this week we can ask our Lord to help us focus this day on the neediest people around us. We can ask to begin new patterns this week by practicing special charity and love, where I haven't been so generous or kind before. The key is to ask and to be very specific. Then, throughout the day, we can keep talking with our Lord, in the "background" about these graces we ask for and the concrete circumstances we find ourselves in. It is in the particular events of our day that we will become "attentive to" our need for our Lord's presence and grace, as well as our need to choose a new pattern. Each evening, we can briefly review the day and recognize some missed opportunities to connect with the Lord or take advantage of a situation here or there, but most of all, we can thank the Lord for the moments of connection that have begun our Lenten journey.

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