



# MAKE THIS YOUR BEST LENT EVER!

## LITTLE WAY THROUGH LENT TO HEAVEN

Much in line with the “Little Way” of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, Our Lady instructed the Venerable Mary of Agreda with these words:

*“Thou must so regulate thy occupations, whatever they may be, that thou do not lose thy time, which can never be recovered. Whether thou eat, labor, rest, sleep, or watch, in all times and places, and in all occupations, adore, reverence and look upon thy great and powerful Lord, who fills all things and conserves all things.”*

St. Thérèse would later write: *“Remember that nothing is small in the eyes of God! Do all that you do with love!”* Which is none other than the embodiment of St. Paul’s command: *“Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatsoever else you do, do all to the glory of God”* (1 Corinthians 10:31). All these seemingly small and insignificant actions will receive a reward from God, as Christ Himself promised: *“And whosoever shall give to drink to one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, amen I say to you, he shall not lose his reward!”* (Matthew 10:42).

Therefore, let us pile up these little sacrifices in their thousands, even millions, like millions of bricks being laid on top of the other in the building of the temple of our soul—with each brick creating more and more holiness in the soul and paying more and more for the many transgressions against the temple of God in the past. As St. Paul says: *“Know you not, that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? But if any man violate the temple of God, him shall God destroy. For the temple of God is holy, which you are!”* (1 Corinthians 3:16)

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## THE “MEATY” PENANCE OF LENT!

This is no second-rate penance! It is not the “B” League! There is real power in fasting. Our Lord Himself chose to practice this means of perfection when led into the desert, by the Holy Spirit, to fast for forty days and forty nights. When later speaking of overcoming the devil, Our Lord said: *“But this kind is not cast out but by prayer and fasting”* (Matthew 17:20).

Listen to one of the great saints and Fathers of the Church, St. Basil: *“Fasting gives birth to prophets and strengthens the powerful; fasting makes lawgivers wise. Fasting is a good safeguard for the soul, a steadfast companion for the body, a weapon for the valiant, and a gymnasium for athletes. Fasting repels temptations, anoints unto piety; it is the comrade of watchfulness and the artificer of chastity. In war it fights bravely, in peace it teaches stillness”* (St. Basil the Great).

Are you struggling with a sin? I mean a sin that you just can’t seem to get rid of; a sin that is keeps you in a constant state of guilt and despair. You’ve prayed, you’ve frequented the sacraments, but you just can’t seem to break its hold. We’ve all been there at one point or another, and such struggles are part and parcel of the spiritual life. But it doesn’t have to be that way.

Today, let us look at a very powerful, but much neglected weapon in the spiritual arsenal: Fasting. If you want to put to energize your spiritual life, if you want to slay a sin that has you in bondage, if you want to grow in union with God, take up the holy weapon of fasting. For as Jesus said, there are some demons that *“cannot be driven out by anything but prayer and fasting.”* Let’s examine this powerful weapon and its use in the spiritual life.

From her earliest days, the Church has taught the need for asceticism in the life of every Christian. That’s right—asceticism is not just monks and priests, but for the laity too. But what is asceticism? Asceticism can be loosely defined as self-denial with the ultimate goal of self-control. And this self-denial most often takes the form of, you guessed it, fasting.

Asceticism is necessary for everyone because of our passions—intense fleshly desires, sometimes referred to as concupiscence. Experience shows that we are often lead about by these desires in a way we can barely control. St. Paul says: *“the flesh lusteth against the spirit: and the spirit against the flesh; for these are contrary one to another”* (Galatians 5:17).

This war is so intense that our passions often lead us to do things we don’t want to do, and we say: *“For that which I work, I understand not. For I do not that good which I will; but the evil which I hate, that I do”* (Romans 7:15).

# FINDING HAPPINESS IN GOD'S WILL

If even worldly people can understand the worthlessness of a happiness that rests on pleasure and possessions, you may be sure that philosophers agree about it, too. The wise men of China, India, and Greece all told the same story: do not put your trust in what can only be toys and passing amusements. The Greeks—Socrates and Plato especially—made a science of this particular point, and it might be a good thing to take a look at what they decided about it.

The philosophers of ancient civilization (before the coming of Our Lord) explained how human beings could not help chasing after their own happiness. They said that man could arrive at happiness only if the good he was looking for was a real one. Man can never be happy, they said, in the enjoyment of a good that pretends to be a good, but is not one really. They also laid down that every being seeks its own proper perfection. The cabbage works at being the perfect cabbage; the growing caterpillar strains to become the perfect caterpillar so that it can become the perfect moth; the baby pushes into youth, and the young are doing their best to model themselves on a pattern of adult perfection.

Now we can leave the Greeks and can bring in St. Thomas Aquinas, the Doctor of the Church who said that our human happiness *"lies in the perfection of our highest faculties."* This gets us one stage further, showing us that happiness and holiness go together. The highest faculties can find perfection only in the highest good — namely, God. So the highest happiness of man lies in drawing near to the perfect holiness of God. The important thing here is that God pours out His holiness to those who make His honor and glory their highest happiness.

So if we really mean to place our happiness in doing God's will, we cannot fail to grow in holiness. The argument goes around and around in what might be called a virtuous circle: we want happiness (see the philosophers), we look for it in God (see the saints), we set our highest faculties to work (see the theologians), we do God's will (see the saints again), and when we do this as well as we can, we become holy. And what about becoming happy, too! Yes, but happiness is a by-product. *"Seek first the kingdom of God, and all these things"* happiness among them — *"will be added to you."*

Look at the life of St. Francis of Assisi, and see how his story bears out the cycle (the various stages of the argument that come around to the beginning). He hungered for God, lived for God alone, made God's will his one aim, and at the end of his life — although blind, in pain, poor, and with his work apparently coming to nothing proclaimed his overwhelming happiness. He knew the theory, and proved it.

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Keep in mind that the passions of our flesh are not necessarily wrong, but because of our fallen nature, they are out of control and they want to dominate us. Left unchecked, our passions will lead us to soul destroying behavior like gluttony, hatred, disordered sexual acts, or addictions of all kinds. Eventually, their control will lead us to Hell. *"The passions of sins ... bring forth fruit unto death"* explains St. Paul (Romans 7:5).

Faced with the reality of the passions, it can be easy to become discouraged and think we can never overcome them. We cry: *"Unhappy man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"* (Romans 7:24). Fortunately, that's not the end of the story, and we are not left as helpless slaves to concupiscence. *"There is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not according to the flesh"* (Romans 8:1).

Through the grace of God, and by walking in the new life that has been purchased for us by Jesus Christ, we can overcome and subdue our passions. We can live as children of God, free from the law of sin that leads to death. If we take things seriously and put forth effort.

So how do we find, practically speaking, this freedom from being controlled by our passions? Again, St. Paul explains: *"For if you live according to the flesh, you shall die: but if by the Spirit you mortify the deeds of the flesh, you shall live"* (Romans 8:13). *"And they that are Christ's, have crucified their flesh, with the vices and concupiscences"* (Galatians 5:24). *"But I chastise my body, and bring it into subjection"* (1 Corinthians 9:27).

In other words, we find freedom from the passions by mortifying them, putting them to death, through the practice of grace-empowered asceticism—specifically, fasting. Fasting helps us tame the wild stallion of our flesh and bring it under the bridle of self-control.

This exercise of bodily mortification—far removed from any form of stoicism—does not imply a condemnation of the flesh. On the contrary mortification aims at the "liberation" of man, who often finds himself, because of concupiscence, almost chained by his own senses. Through bodily fasting man regains strength and the wound inflicted on our nature by intemperance is cured by the medicine of a salutary abstinence.

As Catholics we should never be satisfied with the bare minimum. We should seek to constantly pursue a deeper conversion. St. Francis de Sales gives some good advice in this regard: *"If you are able to fast, you will do well to observe some days beyond what are ordered by the Church, for besides the ordinary effect of fasting in raising the mind, subduing the flesh, confirming goodness, and obtaining a heavenly reward, it is also a great matter to be able to control greediness, and to keep the sensual appetites and the whole body subject to the law of the Spirit; and although we may be able to do but little, the enemy nevertheless stands more in awe of those whom he knows can fast."*

If you already follow the minimal law of the Church, build on that foundation to include fasting in other ways. Here are some ideas, which are akin to the "Little Way" of the Little Flower, St. Thérèse of Lisieux:

- Deny yourself dessert on set days. Most eat too much sugar anyway.
- Don't use salt or other spices on your food.
- Fast from soda. It's terrible for you!
- Skip the beer or other alcoholic drinks when going out to eat.
- Don't eat between meals. This sounds easy, but try it. You'll find it's quite hard since most of us snack frequently and don't even realize it.
- Include things besides food. For example, fast from all technology.
- Fast (one main meal with two small snacks) one day a week.
- Drink only water.

There are a thousand-and-one other ways in which you can add onto the basic 40-Day-Fast, as though you were adding herbs, spices, and other condiments to the 'meal' of penitence you present before God!

# WORDS OF OUR LADY to Ven. Mary of Agreda

Those who are at the point of death, incur the most incredible and dangerous attacks from the demons. That hour is the great trial of life, upon which depends the last sentence of eternal death or eternal life, of eternal suffering or eternal glory.

Lucifer and his satellites prepare to assail the poor and unbewaring soul with all their malice and astuteness in order to vanquish them if possible by various temptations. They search out the natural and acquired failings in his nature, taking into account his inclinations, habits and customs, and where his passions cause him greater weakness.

Those that have a disorderly love of earthly life, they persuade that there is not such great danger and they prevent others from undeceiving them.

Those that have been negligent in the reception of the Sacraments, they try to make still more careless and they place obstacles and difficulties in the way in order that they may die without them, or in order that they may receive them without fruit and with a bad disposition.

Others they fill with false suggestions and shame in order that they may not confess their sins and open their conscience. Others they confuse and try to prevent from making proper restitution and thus unburdening their consciences.

Others, who love vanity, they entangle, even at that last hour, in many vain and proud desires with regard to what is to be done for them after death. Those that have been avaricious or sensual, they seek to excite violently toward what they loved so blindly during life.

In short, of all the bad habits and customs this cruel enemy avails himself in order to fill their minds with images of creatures and draw them away from their salvation or make them incapable of it. Every appetite, which has been inordinately indulged, is an avenue or bypath by which he enters into the citadel of the soul.

Once in, he breathes forth his pestilential fumes, and raises the clouds of darkness, his proper work, so that the soul may not give heed to the divine inspirations, have no true sorrow for its sins, and **do no penance** for its wicked life.

**DAILY PLANNER FOR LENT**

# THE TWO CHIEF LENTEN VIRTUES PART TWO : CHARITY

Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange, in *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*, speaks of the charity, an extract of which now follows:

We cannot treat of the interior life without speaking of the growth of sanctifying grace and of Charity. No one can be saved without this supernatural virtue, the highest of all, which ought to inspire and animate the others. It ought not to remain stationary, but should grow in us even until death. We must first point out that no matter how low in degree, true Charity, received in Baptism or restored by absolution, already loves God.

The slightest degree of infused charity immensely surpasses the natural love that we can have for God and for man. Charity, no matter of how low a degree, excludes no one—for this exclusion would be a grave sin, which would destroy it. Nevertheless this charity of beginners is not victorious over all egoism; far from it. Beside it we find, in our souls, an inordinate love of self, which, without being gravely sinful, is an obstacle to the true radiation of Charity.

Gray stands between black and white. Between the state of mortal sin and that of perfect radiant Charity, stands Charity of a very low degree, the exercise of which is often hindered by a troop of habitual venial sins, of immoderate self-love, of vanity, of laziness, of injustice, and the like. Undoubtedly, this charity of low degree ought to grow.

St. John writes: *“God is Charity: and he that abideth in charity, abideth in God, and God in him”* (1 John 4: 16). He possesses God in his heart; but, still more, God possesses him and holds him, preserving, not only his natural existence, but the life of grace and Charity in him. St. Paul speaks in like manner: *“The Charity of God is poured forth in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost Who is given to us”* (Romans. 5:5.). We have received not only created Charity, but the Holy Ghost Himself, Who is uncreated Charity itself and has been given to us. St. Paul speaks of Him especially, because Charity likens us more to the Holy Ghost, Who is personal love, than to the Father and to the Son. He also says: *“But above all these things have Charity, which is the bond of perfection”* (Colossians 3:14).

A soul cannot have lofty Charity without profound Humility, just as the highest branch of a tree rises toward Heaven in proportion as its roots plunge more deeply into the soil ... The essential perfection of the Christian, consisting in the theological virtues and especially in Charity ...

Through Baptism we have already received the seed of eternal life, for through it we received sanctifying grace which is the radical principle of that life; and with sanctifying grace we received infused Charity, which ought to last forever ... Sanctifying grace and charity, which unite us to God in His intimate life, are, in fact, very superior to extraordinary graces, such as miracles, prophecy and the gift of tongues, which are only signs of the divine intervention and which by themselves do not unite us closely to God ...

Without sanctifying grace and charity, God does not, in fact, dwell in us. It is not sufficient to know Him by a natural philosophical knowledge, or even by the supernatural knowledge of an imperfect Faith united to Hope, as the believer in the state of mortal sin knows Him. God is, so to speak, distant from a believer who is turned away from Him. We must be able to know Him by living Faith connected with charity.

Why should charity thus grow in us? It should grow because the Christian on earth is a traveler, who is advancing spiritually toward God. His spiritual advancement is made by more and more perfect acts of love, *“steps*

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## IMITATION OF CHRIST

Every man naturally desires knowledge; but what good is knowledge without fear of God? Indeed a humble rustic, who serves God, is better than a proud intellectual, who neglects his soul to study the course of the stars.

He who knows himself well, becomes mean in his own eyes and is not happy when praised by men.

If I knew all things in the world and had not charity, what would it profit me, before God, Who will judge me by my deeds?

Shun too great a desire for knowledge, for in it there is much fretting and delusion. Intellectuals like to appear learned and to be called wise.

Yet there are many things the knowledge of which does little or no good to the soul, and he who concerns himself about other things than those which lead to salvation is very unwise.

Many words do not satisfy the soul; but a good life eases the mind and a clean conscience inspires great trust in God.

The more you know and the better you understand, the more severely will you be judged, unless your life is also the more holy.

Do not be proud, therefore, because of your learning or skill. Rather, fear, because of the talent given you. If you think you know many things and understand them well enough, realize at the same time that there is much you do not know.

Hence, do not affect wisdom, but admit your ignorance. Why prefer yourself to anyone else, when many are more learned, more cultured than you?

If you wish to learn and appreciate something worthwhile, then love to be unknown and considered as nothing.

Truly to know and despise self is the best and most perfect counsel. To think of oneself as nothing, and always to think well and highly of others is the best and most perfect wisdom.

Wherefore, if you see another sin openly or commit a serious crime, do not consider yourself better, for you do not know how long you can remain in good estate. All men are frail, but you must admit that none is more frail than yourself.

(*The Imitation of Christ*, Book 1, Chapter 3)

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of love," as St. Gregory says. We must conclude from this that charity on earth can and should always increase, otherwise the Christian would cease in a sense to be a traveler; he would stop before reaching the end of his journey. Since every traveler toward eternity should while on earth grow in charity, not only beginners and proficients, but the perfect ought always to draw nearer to God. And these last, the perfect, ought to advance toward Him so much the more rapidly, as they are nearer to Him and as He draws them more strongly.

This increasingly rapid progress existed especially in the life of the Blessed Virgin for it found no obstacle in her, and it was so much the more intense as the initial speed, or the first grace, was greater. There was in her a marvelous acceleration of the love of God, an acceleration of which that of the fall of bodies is but a remote image. We see thus why charity ought not only to grow in us until death, but to increase more and more like a falling body, the speed of which increases until it reaches its last end.

How, then, does charity grow in us? In its lowest degree charity already loves God above all else with a love of esteem, and its neighbor in general, without excluding anyone. In this sense it cannot have a greater extension; but it can grow in intensity, take deeper root in our will, more strongly determine its inclination to turn to God and to flee sin by more generous acts. In fact, charity does not grow by addition, like a heap of wheat. This addition would multiply charity without making it more intense. The increase would be in the order of quantity rather than of quality, which is quite a different thing. Charity grows in us by making us love God more perfectly and purely for Himself, and our neighbor for God. Charity increases, therefore, like a quality, like heat, by becoming more intense, and that in several ways: by merit, prayer, and the sacraments.

When prayer is humble, trusting, and persevering, it obtains for us a more lively faith, a firmer hope, a more ardent charity, all of which we ask for in the first three petitions of the Our Father. The mental prayer of a just man, who delights in meditating slowly on the Our Father, in nourishing his soul profoundly with each of its petitions, in remaining at times for half-an-hour in the loving contemplation of one of them, at once ... gives a right to an increase of charity, and, by the power of its prayer, it often obtains more than it merits. Besides, when mental prayer is truly fervent, it obtains this increase immediately. Thereby we see how fruitful mental prayer can be; how it draws God strongly toward us that He may give Himself intimately to us and that we may give ourselves to Him.

Holy Communion ought to incorporate us more and more into Christ, by increasing our Humility, Faith, Confidence, and especially our Charity, in order to make our hearts like to that of the Savior—who died out of love for us. In this sense, each of our Holy Communions should be more fervent than the preceding one, for each Communion should not only preserve, but increase the love of God in us, and thus dispose us to receive our Lord on the following day with not only an equal but a greater fervor.

A man, as soon as he sins mortally, loses sanctifying grace and charity, since he turns away from God, Whom he ceases to love more than himself. But divine mercy preserves Faith and infused Hope in him—as long as he does not sin mortally against these virtues by apostasy, despair or presumption. He still preserves the light which indicates the road to be followed and he can still entrust himself to infinite mercy in order to ask of it the grace of conversion.

A just man, even though perfect, cannot continually avoid all venial sins, although he can avoid each venial sin in particular. As he grows in charity, he avoids them more and more. According as a soul is more or less intense or fervent, the soul will actually avoid them more or less. Detachment from creatures will increase with the progress of charity, or of attachment to God.

# MORE QUOTES TO CUT-OUT AND POST

**“The power of prayer is really tremendous”  
(St. Therese of Lisieux)**

**“When prayer is poured forth, sins are covered!” (St. Peter Julian Emyard)**

**“He who prays most, receives most!”  
(St. Alphonsus Liguori)**

**“He knows how to live well, who knows how to pray well!” (St. Augustine)**

**“By prayer, man gives God the greatest glory possible!” (St. Peter Julian Emyard)**