

Lenten Season of Peace



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Introduction

Peace is both an individual and collective experience. We, as Secular Franciscans, have the ability and the responsibility to promote peace in the world through our thoughts, words, and actions. We are called to be advocates for those who are suffering, especially from violence. Acts of violence are not only those that leave physical scars. Emotional and spiritual scars, though unseen to the naked eye, are more prevalent and far more lasting.

This Lenten season, I invite you to pray for an end of the violence that permeates in our world. As a further challenge, I invite you to begin with the person you spend the most time with. Yes, I mean YOU and ME! In our every day lives, we are more violent than we realize. How often do we resort to angry words, heated arguments, or a stance of unforgiveness?

It is easy to point the finger of blame for all the violence on “those people” – the school, mall and theater shooters, suicide bombers, gangs, or anyone wielding a weapon of fear and hatred. Yet, as we point the finger of blame, we fail to recognize the three fingers pointing back at us.

Article 7 of our Holy Rules states: *United by their vocation as “brothers and sisters of penance,” and motivated by the dynamic power of the gospel; let them conform their thoughts and deeds to those of Christ by means of that radical interior change which the gospel itself calls “conversion.” Human frailty makes it necessary that this conversion be carried out daily.*

Peace happens one person, one prayer, one outstretched hand at a time. Lent is a season of fasting but there is also a time for feasting. During this holy season, let us think about our call to fast from the overwhelming problems of busyness and feast on mindful and unceasing prayer. Let us fast from violence and fear and feast on the prayer for peace and compassion.

And the Lord said: I will give you a new heart, and place a new spirit within you, taking from your bodies your stony hearts, and giving you hearts of flesh. I will put My spirit within you, and make you live by My ways, careful to observe my decrees. (cf. Ezekiel 36: 26-27)



Begin each meditation by taking in a deep breath; taking in God’s love, the light of Christ, and the wisdom of the Holy Spirit. Exhale all your worries, your challenges, and your fears. During this time of Lent, choose to reflect on what you can fast from or what you can feast on. There is also a psalm fragment and a question to ponder. Then, end your time of prayer and reflection with the Lenten prayer, which is said after each time of meditation.

Each meditation is brief, allowing you to spend as much time as you like. Remember, it is not about quantity but quality. Choose to create quality time with the One who chose to die for you and set you free!

Ash Wednesday

Fast from worry and guilt; Feast on trusting in the Lord

*“Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
And lean not on your own understanding;
In all your ways acknowledge Him,
And He shall direct your paths.” ~ Proverbs 3:5-6*

This Proverb sums it up beautifully. When we lean on our own understanding, our own will, life tends to go awry. Then enter worry, guilt, fear, shame, doubt and a host of other detractors. This season of Lent reminds us of who we are – sons and daughters of the King of Kings, who sent his only begotten Son to conquer worry, guilt and its many legions. The Prophet Joel tells us to rend our hearts and return to the Lord, who is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and rich in kindness.

Psalm Fragment:

*“Have mercy on me, O God, in your goodness;
in the greatness of your compassion wipe out my offense.” ~ Psalm 51:1*

Question to Ponder: Where in my life do I fail to trust in the Lord?

Prayer:

Loving and gracious God, help me to fast from anything that leads me away from you and teach me to feast on all that brings me closer to you. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.



First Sunday of Lent

Fast from judging others; Feast on Christ dwelling within them

Jesus tells us: *“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.”* (Matthew 7:1-2)

To judge another becomes an act of violence when we judge the person and not the behavior. People must be held accountable for inappropriate behavior, but we must not condemn and label the person. We are to always “trust in the presence of the divine seed in everyone and in the transforming power of love and pardon” (Article 19, OFS Rule).

Psalm Fragment:

*“May he judge your people with righteousness,
and your poor with justice.” ~ Psalm 72:2*

Question to Ponder: Do I tend to judge the person or the person’s behavior?

Prayer:

Loving and gracious God, help me to fast from anything that leads me away from you and teach me to feast on all that brings me closer to you. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

**Second Sunday of Lent**

Fast from emphasis on our differences; Feast on our oneness

Jesus prayed before he gave his life for us, *“that they may all be one.”*

God, in his infinite wisdom, created all peoples in his image and likeness. In our unending fear, we tend to focus on that which divides us, what makes us different. Instead of focusing on our differences, let us emphasize our oneness – that we are all beloved children of God.

Psalm Fragment:

*“Turn, O Lord, and deliver my soul;
save me because of your kindness.” ~ Psalm 6: 5*

Question to Ponder: How do I cause division with my thoughts, words or actions?

Prayer:

Loving and gracious God, help me to fast from anything that leads me away from you and teach me to feast on all that brings me closer to you. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.



Third Sunday of Lent

Fast from bitterness; Feast on forgiveness

I believe one of the most violent acts we can commit is to harbor bitterness in our hearts. It is violent because it only leads to hardness of heart and mind. Jesus teaches us to forgive one another because we have been forgiven. When you forgive, it softens your heart and helps you to loosen the bonds of bitterness and resentment.

Psalm Fragment:

*“Blessed is the one whose offense is forgiven,
whose sin is erased.” ~ Psalm 32:1*

Question to Ponder: Where in my life can I loosen the grip of bitterness and soften into forgiveness?

Prayer:

Loving and gracious God, help me to fast from anything that leads me away from you and teach me to feast on all that brings me closer to you. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.



The Annunciation

Fast from self-centeredness; Feast on compassion for others

Our Mother Mary always prayed with a heart of compassion for others. Her *Magnificat* speaks of God’s justice for those who are on the margins of society. Her words are bold and clear as she speaks of the lowly, the hungry, the humble and the poor as being exalted in God’s Kingdom. As a very young and unmarried girl, being chosen to bear the Messiah might have caused Our Lady to focus on herself and the enormity of her role. And yet, she gave herself as the handmaid of the Lord and felt the needs of those much less fortunate.

Psalm Fragment:

*“Place your hope in the Lord:
be strong and courageous in your heart,
and place your hope in the Lord.” ~ Psalm 27:14*

Question to Ponder: How often do I step outside of myself to care for the needs of others?

Prayer:

Loving and gracious God, help me to fast from anything that leads me away from you and teach me to feast on all that brings me closer to you. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

**Fourth Sunday of Lent**

Fast from discontent; Feast on gratitude

“If we can realize that everything is God’s gift, how happy will our hearts be! Everything is his gift. ... Saying ‘thank you’ is such an easy thing, and yet so hard! How often do we say ‘thank you’ to one another in our families?” ~ Pope Francis

Discontent comes from not remembering what God has given you or done for you. When we can feast on being thankful and appreciative for all of God’s gifts, then discontentment won’t have the last word.

Psalm Fragment:

*“Entrust your cares to the Lord,
and he will uphold you;*

he will never allow the righteous to waver.” ~ Psalm 55:23

Question to Ponder: When was the last time I said “thank you” to the people in my life?

Prayer:

Loving and gracious God, help me to fast from anything that leads me away from you and teach me to feast on all that brings me closer to you. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.



Fifth Sunday of Lent

Fast from overwhelming stress; Feast on abounding self-care

Not caring for oneself is doing violence to oneself. We live in a world where overwhelming stress has become the norm and self-care is selfish. If we do not take care of ourselves, then who will? And if we are not properly cared for then we cannot help another in need. We cannot give away what we do not have. When you feast on self care, then you are able to care for others.

Psalm Fragment:

*“Therefore, my heart is glad and my soul rejoices;
my body too is filled with confidence.” ~ Psalm 16:9*

Question to Ponder: When was the last time I took time to truly care for myself?

Prayer:

Loving and gracious God, help me to fast from anything that leads me away from you and teach me to feast on all that brings me closer to you. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.



Sunday of the Lord's Passion

Fast from words that pollute; Feast on words that purify

The Proverbs teach us that the power of life and death is in the tongue. Words can harm as well as heal. There is an overwhelming tendency to speak first and think later. What if we reverse that and think before we spoke? Then, there wouldn't be a lingering spirit of regret and the need to retract words spoken in haste and anger.

Before you speak, THINK! Ask yourself: Is what I am about to say **TRUE**; **HELPFUL**; **INSPIRING**; **NECESSARY**; and **KIND**. If you answered NO to at least one, then refrain from saying it.

Psalm Fragment:

*“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you,
O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.” ~ Psalm 19:14*

Question to Ponder: Do I **THINK** before I speak?

Prayer:

Loving and gracious God, help me to fast from anything that leads me away from you and teach me to feast on all that brings me closer to you. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

**Holy Thursday**

Fast from complaining; Feast on appreciation

Ever been around a chronic complainer? A chronic complainer is someone who complains about everything and refuses to do anything to change the situation. Complaining can drain the life out of the complainer and the hearer of those complaints. After awhile, no one wants to listen. If you cannot change the circumstance, then change your attitude about the circumstance. Instead of complaining, find something to appreciate. It takes the same amount of effort, and yet, the results are much more peaceful.

Psalm Fragment:

*"The Lord has listened to my pleas;
the Lord has accepted my prayer."* ~ Psalm 6:10

Question to Ponder: Do I constantly complain about things I have no control over? What can I find to appreciate instead?

Prayer:

Loving and gracious God, help me to fast from anything that leads me away from you and teach me to feast on all that brings me closer to you. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.



Good Friday of the Lord's Passion

Fast from idle gossip; Feast on purposeful silence

During World War II, there was an idiom that went, "Loose lips sink ships!" It meant beware of unguarded talk. Today, that expression still rings true when it comes to idle gossip. Gossip is idle talk or rumor, especially about the private or personal affairs of others. Instead of engaging in gossip, idle or otherwise, try being silent on purpose. Then, speak only if it improves the silence. Another idiom: "Everybody's business is nobody's business!"

Psalm Fragment:

*"Deliver me, O Lord, from lying lips
and from deceitful tongues." ~ Psalm 120:2*

Question to Ponder: There are three kinds of businesses: Mine, God's and everyone else's. Whose business am I minding right now?

Prayer:

Loving and gracious God, help me to fast from anything that leads me away from you and teach me to feast on all that brings me closer to you. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.



Holy Saturday

Fast from constant chatter; Feast on active listening

You gain more wisdom and knowledge by listening than by constant chatter. This is a rather obvious statement; and yet, so few engage in active listening. We tend to wait until it is our turn to speak; not really hearing what was just said. How can we listen to our God if we cannot even listen to one another? Try turning down the volume on the chatter and turning up the volume on the listening.

Psalm Fragment:

*"I cry aloud to God,
for when I cry out to God, he hears me." ~ Psalm 77:1*

Question to Ponder: Do I truly listen to those who are speaking? Or, am I merely waiting for my turn to speak?

Prayer:

Loving and gracious God, help me to fast from anything that leads me away from you and teach me to feast on all that brings me closer to you. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

**Easter Sunday – Resurrection of the Lord**

Fast from the darkness around us; Feast on the light of Christ

During the Lenten journey, we entered the wilderness with Jesus. The way at times can seem dark, but it is in the darkness that we become aware of the light. With Jesus, we come to Resurrection Day! After a long dark journey, we can sing Alleluia! Glory to God in the highest! As the Prophet Isaiah proclaimed, the people who lived in darkness have indeed seen a great light. We too, have seen that light – the light of Christ. Let us remain in the light and proclaim Christ to all those still in darkness.

Psalm Fragment:

*“The Lord is good to all,
showing compassion to every creature.” ~ Psalm 145:9*

Question to Ponder: How can I be a beacon of Christ's light to those I come in contact with?

Prayer:

Loving and gracious God, help me to fast from anything that leads me away from you and teach me to feast on all that brings me closer to you. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.



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