

THE
BRIGHT PATH
IN THE
DARK WORLD

Reading The Divine Comedy

Lent 2026



AN INVITATION |

“In the narrow streets of Florence Dante felt that there was room for Purgatory and Heaven and Hell.”

Chesterton

The Divine Comedy is a Parable, a work of fiction where the author (Dante) is also a character in his own story. It is referred to as a “Comedy” in the ancient sense, because it has a happy (blessed) ending, not because it is funny.

Dante remains a narrator capable of educating the reader in the classics, but, more importantly, a spiritual director for the soul that thirsts for transcendence and longs for transformation. However, before you can go up, you must go down.

The questions we are asking are simple: “Is the human being a piece of machinery, with buttons and levers that, if pulled or pushed at the right time, get the same results – like rats in a lab called ‘humanity’? Or - more importantly - is the human being a pilgrim on a journey?” At All Saints, we believe the latter is true, and that the life given to the machinery causes the person to become unmoored from reality itself, and less and less capable of true happiness.

Paradoxically, that which causes us happiness is usually that which we think will cause us pain. People are less happy now than at any other time in modern history, yet totally committed to doing things that undermine their happiness. We don’t have healthy sleep diets, social community, or regular rhythms of worship anymore. Our culture feels like we are living in the wake of a once-great civilization. We have the outcome of a previous generation’s sacrifice without the energy to make sacrifices ourselves.

Staring at the little screen, we stay up late in search of our significance, allowing our bodies no rest that would allow the mind to truly ponder these concerns. Instead of going to the pub for a drink with friends, we debate others online, where they are a version of themselves they would never project in person, and slowly begin to wither. The average churchgoer today considers once a month “regular” attendance, while twenty years ago, three times a month was considered “regular attendance.” Life is about more than a decision to go to heaven; it is a journey that discerns the truth of our nature and its healing. But it can feel daunting.

At a very dark time in my own life some years ago, the Lord drew me in like a fish on a line to the incomparable work of Dante. Struggling to put into words the things that were causing me pain, with a terrible sleep schedule, and withering devotion to friends and the scriptures, it seemed as if this Florentine politician and former soldier, writing a book nearly 700 years ago, spoke directly to my soul.

I realized that *The Divine Comedy* was not really about the mechanics of the afterlife, but about what happens when the soul feels lost – so lost that she cannot make her way back to warmer skies and greener planes. Lent is similar. We take the time to sweep up the dust of our souls so that God can light the fires of our hearts.

A friend of mine told me his dad asked him to build a fire in the fireplace. After the flame lasted only a few minutes before dying out, his father asked, “Why did the flame die so soon?”

Confused, the son said, “Dad, I have watched you do it so many times. I have no idea.” His father took him to the fireplace and began removing some of the wood before relighting the fire. Only this time, the flame did not die. “You see, you need to give the wood enough space to generate enough oxygen to produce an enduring flame.”

My prayer for you is simple: As you press into Lent again this year, may it be to keep burning that “enduring flame” alive for the sake of Christ being King over our City and sitting on the throne of our hearts.

Prayer: “Oh God of power and might, grant to your faithful servant the desire and strength to take the journey of the pilgrim into Your heart for Lent. The strength I need comes only from you. Please help me, by the power of Your Spirit, for the fame of Christ and His glory. Amen.”

WHY ARE WE DOING THIS? |

Our goal for the church is not to read the entire work, but to engage more intentionally in the habits of reflection and repentance during this season. The participant can just read one Canto (chapter) a week, engage in one spiritual activity (Daily Examen or Fasting), and watch one video. The participant, who desires to get the most out of the experience, might consider reading through the entire work according to the dates of Lent. You can find the order at the bottom of this document.

More importantly, we are doing this because Lent and the entire church calendar are meant to engage the imagination. The Church, at its best, does this through the liturgy and the calendar.

Throughout the centuries, we have set aside Lent as a special time of focus on the sanctifying work of the Spirit. It is not a time of shame or guilt, but a time to shake off the dust of indifference and find renewal in the habits of the heart.

The Church has also participated in “divine reading” of the scripture and, at times, other spiritual books. We do not think the *Comedy* is on the same level as scripture, but

it helps reveal eternal truths in scripture, so we recommend it as a tool to deepen prayer and study.

MISCONCEPTIONS |

1. Dante does not tell you what the exact construction of hell, purgatory, or heaven will look like; rather, he is telling you of what the interior life of the soul looks like for many of us, whether we are on the journey to wholeness (heaven) or stuck at the beginning (hell). This is why we will still engage with Purgatory, not as a reality people go to before entering heaven, but as a part of the pilgrim's journey of sanctification before entering true blessedness.
2. Dante is obsessed with scripture and quotes it more than 500 times throughout the work. We will do likewise in our journey together.
3. Dante is not writing a theological work, but a work of the imagination that interacts with philosophy, theology, and the church.
4. Written long before the Reformation, the only church Dante would have ever known was the Roman Catholic Church, and the only Bible he would have had access to was the Latin Vulgate. Please keep this in mind when reading the text. Dante is a man of his time, writing as a poet, not as an apologist for Roman Catholicism.
5. Anyone can read the story. It is accessible to the layman and deep enough for the scholar. However, we will not be engaging in an *academic* sense, but in a purely imaginative way, committing ourselves to spiritual direction.
6. And finally, Dante encourages the reader to think for himself. You will see as you read the story that Dante puts Popes in hell, pagan philosophers in a state of semi-comfort, and the poor in heaven.

BIG PICTURE |

Imagine that you find yourself lost in darkness and do not know the way out. A man reveals himself as your friend and seeks to walk alongside you as you walk through the pain of hell to behold the glories of heaven. Go on the journey with Dante as your spiritual director.

Lent is not about reading all 100 Cantos of *The Divine Comedy*, but walking together through the images, stories, and confrontations that Dante leads us through. We live in dark times, focused on the latest political, relational, and human dramas. We are all tempted to take our place on the stage and go along with the stories others have created for us, but Dante encourages us to do something different: confront the darkness within us and resist the tyrannies of the world. Seek to behold the face of God.

The themes are as follows:

Inferno: facing sin without fear

Purgatorio: journey towards healing

Paradiso: beholding God rightly

We will be walking through one spiritual practice this Lent: the Daily Examen.

Use this same structure every day in a notebook or in the margins:

1. Presence

“Lord, show me myself as you see me—without fear or shame.”

2. Attention

Re-read one image or line from today’s canto. Let it linger.

3. Honest Review

Notice where your life echoes this image—without defending yourself.

4. Grace

Ask for one specific grace (not self-improvement).

5. Hopeful Resolve

Choose one small, concrete act for tomorrow.

Weekly Rhythm

- Read: One short passage (provided each week)
- Reflect: One guiding question
- Pray: A brief prayer shaped by the theme
- Practice: A simple spiritual discipline
- Take the assigned Canto for the week, and reflect on the Canto through the Examen.

Daily Rhythm

- Read the cantos assigned for the day
- Record your thoughts in a notebook
- Write down your experience with the examen on the assigned reading days

How to Use This Guide

- Read alone or with others
- Miss a day? Begin again—no guilt
- Let the images work slowly
- Trust that God is more committed to your healing than you are

Resources:

- Free Audio version: https://youtu.be/0Ny0mu0qFCA?si=y4jEX-dRo1_JGIRY
- Translations:
 - Complete one-volume: <https://a.co/d/f7IYHBN>
 - Hollander translation (BOOK): <https://a.co/d/0zMSIAL>
 - Hollander translation (online and free):
https://dante.princeton.edu/dante/pdp/commedia.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com
 - Esolen Transaltion:
 - Inferno: <https://a.co/d/jbGlsVu>
 - Purgatory: <https://a.co/d/iNVNqJv>
 - Paradise: <https://a.co/d/djPet0W>
- Optional Yale Course:
<https://youtu.be/679FGDpZBew?si=PBwA9UU6gT78CWfP>
 - The secular perspective has its limits, but this is a good resource for those who want to dive deep into the historical perspective of the *Comedy*.
- Full Guide:
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1jR40RKEfnuBFoUSfgX9yl987YxES02zi5dlNhso8YQ8/edit?usp=sharing>

Weeks 1-2: Inferno

Dante begins lost, confused, afraid, and unable to move forward.

Inferno helps us name how disordered love leads us away from God and from one another.

Practice:

- Daily examen
- Fasting as learning to say no to false satisfactions
- Honest self-reflection (not judgment of others)

Weeks 3-5: Purgatorio

Purgatory is not punishment—it is healing. Souls move upward as their loves are slowly re-ordered by grace, effort, and patience.

Practice:

- Confession and repentance
- Taking up one life-giving habit
- Almsgiving as participation in God's restoration

Week 6: Holy Week & Easter

A Glimpse of Glory

We do not master heaven—we are invited to behold it.

Paradise is the end of the journey where desire finally rests in God.

Practice:

- Silence
- Worship
- Joy rooted in resurrection

Day	Date	Reading
1	Wed Feb 18	Inferno I
2	Thu Feb 19	Inferno II–III
3	Fri Feb 20	Inferno IV–V
4	Mon Feb 23	Inferno VI–VII
5	Tue Feb 24	Inferno VIII–IX
6	Wed Feb 25	Inferno X–XI
7	Thu Feb 26	Inferno XII–XIII
8	Fri Feb 27	Inferno XIV–XV
9	Mon Mar 2	Inferno XVI–XVII
10	Tue Mar 3	Inferno XVIII–XIX
11	Wed Mar 4	Inferno XX–XXI
12	Thu Mar 5	Inferno XXII–XXIII
13	Fri Mar 6	Inferno XXIV–XXV
14	Mon Mar 9	Inferno XXVI–XXVII
15	Tue Mar 10	Inferno XXVIII–XXIX
16	Wed Mar 11	Inferno XXX–XXXI
17	Thu Mar 12	Inferno XXXII–XXXIV
18	Fri Mar 13	Purgatorio I–II
19	Mon Mar 16	Purgatorio III–IV
20	Tue Mar 17	Purgatorio V–VI
21	Wed Mar 18	Purgatorio VII–VIII

22	Thu Mar 19	Purgatorio IX–X
23	Fri Mar 20	Purgatorio XI–XII
24	Mon Mar 23	Purgatorio XIII–XIV
25	Tue Mar 24	Purgatorio XV–XVI
26	Wed Mar 25	Purgatorio XVII–XVIII
27	Thu Mar 26	Purgatorio XIX–XX
28	Fri Mar 27	Purgatorio XXI–XXII
29	Mon Mar 30	Purgatorio XXIII–XXIV
30	Tue Mar 31	Purgatorio XXV–XXVI
31	Wed Apr 1	Purgatorio XXVII–XXIX
32	Thu Apr 2	Purgatorio XXX–XXXI
33	Fri Apr 3	Purgatorio XXXII–XXXIII
34	Mon Apr 6	Paradiso I–III
35	Tue Apr 7	Paradiso IV–VI
36	Wed Apr 8	Paradiso VII–IX
37	Thu Apr 9	Paradiso X–XII
38	Fri Apr 10	Paradiso XIII–XV
39	Mon Apr 13	Paradiso XVI–XX
40	Tue Apr 14	Paradiso XXI–XXXIII