

The Shrines Of The Black Madonna Of The Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church

A Best Self Lenten Guide



*Lenten Theme:
"Working on My Soul's Salvation"*

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"Working on My Soul's Salvation"

This Lenten booklet was adapted on February 9, 2021 by *Bishop Mbiyu K. I. Chui*, under the inspiration and guidance of our beloved Founder, *Jaramogi Abebe Agyeman*
(*Rev. Albert B. Cleage, Jr.*)

If lost, please return to:

A Best Self Lent

During the season of Lent our focus is to become more *constructive* and *productive*, rather than to merely be '*remorseful*' and '*shameful*' over the guilt of our past sins. We utilize this 40 day period to re-align ourselves with the great accomplishments of **Jesus**, and his call for personal transformation and spiritual growth. (*I will make you fishers of men, if you follow me!*) We recognize that his suffering and death upon the cross was not in vain, but a necessary step in the transformation of his disciples and followers.

“No greater love, than a man would lay down his life for a friend.”

A Best Self Lent means striving for measurable improvement in our relationship with GOD and others, as well as giving our best in the work of the Kingdom. To help facilitate one’s spiritual growth and maturity, a practical plan should include the following categories of transformation:

- A. Liberation Triangle Goals** (*tithing, ministry, group life, communal work*)
- B. Relationship Goals** (*practicing non-injury*)
- C. Personal Transformation Goals**
(*new attitudes/habits*)

My Best Self Lenten Plan

During the 40 days of Lent I will do the following things to help nurture my faith and improve my ability to serve GOD *body, mind and spirit.*

Liberation Triangle Goals

Ujamaa Kodi/Tithing: _____

Ujamaa Kazi/Work: _____

Kusanya Watu/Evangelism: _____

Relationship Goals

Personal Transformation Goals

Power In Meditation & Prayer

“And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up on a mountain by himself to pray. And when evening had come, he was there alone.”

Matthew 14:23

Although GOD saw that it was not good for man to live alone, there are times when being alone can afford us greater strength. Even Jesus felt the need to be alone at times, to seek relief from the strain and stress of life. During these quiet times, he retreated to a *tree*, a *garden* or a *hilltop*, where he found solace through prayer and meditation.

“Twice in each twenty-four hours the tides of the ocean—soiled and discolored through contact with our shores—withdraw themselves into the bosom of the deep to be *cleansed* and *re-baptized* in the clean and salt immensity of the sea. There they hear again the call of the sun, the moon and the stars, and come back cleansed with a blessed power upon the coasts which are unlovely without them and are kept sweet only by their healing contact.”

Life is like that. For we too are much stained through our contact with occupation or pleasure through all the coast of reality. The withdrawing tides of our souls need to be gathered again into the clean, the vast, and the unfailing; there to be *re-baptized* in goodness and vision; there to hear the voice of the eternal, to answer to the compulsion of the Unseen. Out of such a communion as this we shall return again to our duties and relationships—healed and recollected—to achieve some vaster advance, some new victory and to release some deepened measure of love and power.”

-----*Gaius Glenn Atkins*

The Hail Mary

*Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee.
Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit
of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of GOD, pray
for us sinners now and at the hour of our death.*

This powerful **repetitive prayer** used along with the rosary has been chanted for ages, to evoke the feminine energy and divine presence of GOD. It comes from **Luke 1:28** and can be employed during Lent to heighten your spiritual consciousness. After each *repetition* of the prayer, you should make the **sign of the cross**.

Scriptural Lenten Meditations

The Betrayal ~ in the Garden, Jesus was betrayed by his disciples when they lost faith and began to doubt. (**Mark 14:41**) “*I will not betray the Covenant Community upon which I depend for both my survival and salvation.*”

Submission ~ In the Garden, Jesus prayed for strength to face the agony of the cross. In the end he rose above his desires and gave unconditional submission to the will of GOD. (**Luke 22:41 & 42**) “*Like Jesus, I am no longer conflicted in my purpose. I will serve GOD and GOD alone.*”

The Suffering ~ Even as his own people jeered and mocked him on the cross, Jesus asked GOD not to avenge him, but to forgive them because they were not aware of what they were doing. (**Luke 23:34**) “*Even in the midst of condemnation and persecution, I will continue to practice the love of Jesus.*”

The Sacrifice ~ Jesus was crucified, without any hope of escaping death upon the cross. He surrendered himself into the hands of GOD. (**Luke 23:46**) “*Like Jesus, I know there is no vain effort when I commit myself fully into the hands of GOD.*”

Scriptural Nourishment for Lent

Read the following scriptures as a source of strength, and solace during Lent. Choose one scripture each day, reflect upon it, and apply it to your daily living. You may also include them as a part of your Daily Lenten Observances.

Psalms 11: 1-7 (*The Lord is Good*)

Psalms 12: 1-8 (*Prayer Petition*)

Psalms 14: 1-7 (*Resisting evil*)

Psalms 15: 1-5 (*Concern for others*)

Psalms 16: 1-11 (*GOD is my Refuge*)

Psalms 18: 46-49 (*Victory comes from GOD*)

Psalms 19: 7-14 (*Obey the Lord*)

Proverbs 17: 19-24 (*Kind Speech*)

Proverbs 10: 22-32 (*Be Righteous*)

Proverbs 3: 1-12 (*Love & Faithfulness*)

Proverbs 6:16-19 (*GOD Don't Like Ugly*)

Ecclesiastes 4: 8-12 (*Renouncing Individualism*)

Ecclesiastes 5: 2 & 4-7 (*Keeping Your Vows*)

Ecclesiastes 9: 11-12 (*Depend on the Lord*)

Ecclesiastes 12: 13-14 (*Doing your Duty*)

Isaiah 48: 17-19 (*The Lord is my Redeemer*)

Habakkuk 3: 1-2 (*Habakkuk's Prayer*)

Matthew 6: 9-15 (*On forgiveness*)

Matthew 17: 15-17 (*Brotherly Correction*)

Matthew 21: 21-22 (*Earnest Prayer*)

John 10: 11-18 (*The Good Shepherd*)

John 15: 7-17 (*No Greater Love*)

Ash Wednesday

Ash Wednesday is the first day of 40 special, sacrificial days of *Penance*. We utilize the palms, symbolic of liberation as a first token act of Penance to indicate we are contrite of heart for the ways we have violated the covenant agreement and slowed down the building of GOD's earthly kingdom during the past year. We seek GOD's forgiveness for the egocentricity that has separated us from becoming our Best selves and blocked the healing power of GOD within. We pledge through this ritual journey to seek atonement through *acts of faith* that we will engage in during the next 40 days.

Weekly Lenten Themes

- Week #1 ~ Confession & Absolution
- Week #2 ~ Penance
- Week #3 ~ Purification
- Week #4 ~ Faith
- Week #5 ~ Love
- Week # 6 ~ Transformation
- Holy Week** ~ Sacrifice

Lent is a season in the Christian Calendar in which a feeling and expression of sorrow for sin is observed, and a time we work on both our personal and collective transformation as a Best Self Church. In preparation for the *Holy Spirit* to come upon us, we seek to dissolve any blocks or barriers in our path. We expect a new resurrection in our lives, as we work communally to do GOD's will. We seek a greater love, within ourselves and our brothers and sisters. We devote this special time to build those bridges of love, which will bring us into higher communion with the *Most High*.

The Lenten Season is a 40-day period (*excluding Sundays*) beginning on Ash Wednesday and ending on Easter Sunday morning. The special symbols of Lent include: **Ash** – *repentance, ritual purity and cleansing*; **Cross** – *revolution*; **Palm Leaves** – *liberation*; **Ankh** – *ancient symbol of life and power*; **Crown of Thorns** – *sacrifice*; Rosary – *prayer and penitence*.

Lent means “*Spring*” and it is a time when we do the spiritual housecleaning, synonymous with this season of the year. We take inventory on what we have done for GOD and our church. We reflect upon how much we have grown to become better Christians and to actualize our highest potential. Thus we *fast, meditate and pray* so that after these 40 days, we can truly be *born again!*

Significance of Lent

As members of the P.A.O.C.C. we recognize Lent as one of the most significant religious seasons on the church calendar. Lent give us a *focused opportunity* to rearrange our **spiritual priorities** and to fulfill our higher calling in GOD. Lent helps us step back for a minute and look at how we are *relating* to GOD, and to one another. We consciously work to **realign** our *mind, body and spirit* with Divine will and purpose. We take time to rid ourselves of those *unwanted attitudes, behaviors, temptations, and negative feelings*, which obstruct the free flow of GOD-power in our lives.

In the words of our beloved Founder, Jaramogi A. Agyeman, “*We are not saved once, but many times!*” The prophet **Joel** heard the spirit of the Lord say: “**Return to me with your whole heart.**” During Lent we look at ourselves and realize there is still a part of our heart that *forgets, refuses, procrastinates, fears* or is **unaware** of how much it needs to reflect the *love, power, mercy and goodness* of the Almighty One. We do whatever is necessary to increase our *spiritual will*, so that we may return to GOD *with whole hearts*.

Our fasting ought to relate to our personal need for transformation, as well as to the current situation of the world in which we live. We fast according to

how it relates to what we need to grow spiritually. We begin by asking ourselves, “What is lacking in my relationship with GOD and others?” Listen to your heart and determine what is most urgent or challenging at this particular time in your life. During the entire Lenten Season, remember to focus on your own spiritual hunger each time you long for whatever you have chosen to deprive yourself of during the 40-day period.

If you choose to extend your fast beyond the suggested times remember that you are not alone. When we involve ourselves in the group life, we allow the divine energy to work more freely within us. Each day of Lent renew your intention to grow closer to GOD by being faithful to your spiritual practice. Fasting is not meant to take the joy out of our lives, but rather to bring us more joy! It can lead us to a great inner clarity and a renewed faith in GOD’S plan for us. Whether we are fasting from food, drink, our time or words, from a set of thoughts or behaviors, we are choosing to willfully surrender to the desires of the Spirit. If you pray earnestly, asking in faith, the Lord will give you the desires of your heart!

Holy Week Chants

“Father let Thy will be done, not mine!”

“Lord, help me to be more like Jesus!”

“Lord, have Thine own way within me!”

Pray Your Way Through Lent

Ash Wednesday/1st Week

Cleanse me O Lord, so I may return to You with my whole heart, body and mind. Guide and direct me, as I strive to be more fully united with Thee. Give me the discipline and courage I need to carry out my Lenten practices daily. Lord, let Thy will be done, not mine. In the name of our Standard Bearer, Jesus, Amen.

2nd Week of Lent

Forgive me O Lord, of my shortcomings that I may become more worthy of Thy awesome power and of Thy presence in my life. Make me ready Lord to do Thy will with joy and earnestness. Show me how to give my heart more fully to You. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen.

3rd Week of Lent

Purify me O Lord, my Redeemer. Help me to feel more often, Your everlasting goodness, love and mercy upon me. Let the power of Your loving presence radiate within me, touching all who cross my path. Lead me through each day with a growing awareness of my complete dependence upon Thee. In the name of the Black Messiah, Jesus I pray, Amen.

Pray Your Way Through Lent

4th Week of Lent

Almighty One, search the deepest spaces of my heart. Enter in Lord and take away anything that is not like You. Increase my faith in Your divine goodness, so that I may be able to walk in the light of Your ways. Create in me a strong desire to put You first in my life. Lord I belong to You, and You alone. This I pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

5th Week of Lent

Bless O GOD, your humble servant with more love for others and for Thee. Fill my hungry soul with the spirit of Thy wonderful light. In spite of my failures or shortcomings, please do not take Thy everlasting love away from me. Restore my hope in Your constant and ever-present help. Bless me now, in the loving name of Jesus, our revolutionary example, Amen.

6th Week of Lent

Transform me O Lord, so I can follow the example of Jesus in my devotion to serve others. I thank You daily for the new life I have found in this church community. Give me courage to trust Your divine promises more completely. Help me not to waver in my faith, as I struggle to live as a more caring, giving creature. Lord do all these things in Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

Pray Your Way Through Lent

Holy Week

Lord, help me to remember the sacrifice of Jesus on Calvary's cross. Let his life and death not have been in vain. Help me to surrender when I feel most afraid or down cast. Deliver me from evil. In the matchless name of Jesus, I pray, Amen.

Fasting: A Potent Tool for Spiritual Growth

Fasting is one of the *least practiced* of all spiritual disciplines in the modern world. Yet, if fasting is understood as more than just the *deprivation of food*, it can be a source of tremendous spiritual growth! Ancient religions encouraged fasting in their rituals as a spiritual discipline and pathway to find GOD. *Religious healers, Priests and Shaman* were required to take extended fasts as part of their training. The tradition of **fasting** influenced the *African Nation Israel* in their religious practice as well.

Scripture indicates **fasting** served a variety of purposes included: 1) **healing** for one in mourning or loss; 2) as **readiness** for being sent on a mission by GOD; 3) a **sign of repentance** from sin; 4) as a **companion** in prayer; 5) as **preparation** for an encounter with GOD; 6) as an **observance** of significant events when GOD delivered his people; 7) as a **source of petition** for GOD's help in difficult times.

During Lent we fast from **after** the *dinner hour*, until the *breakfast hour* of any given day. For this brief period we refrain from the intake of **solid foods**. **Fasting** may also include removing anything (*attitudes, activities, actions, etc.*) which block our closer communion with GOD.

My Lenten Journal

My Lenten Journal

Inspiration For the Journey

“Half the wrongs of human life exist because of the inertia of people who simply will not use their energies in fighting for what they believe in.” **Unknown**

“Oppression does not always crush the spirit of progress. Men will achieve in spite of it.” **Carter G. Woodson**

“We are not going back. . . we cannot return to yesteryear, no matter how perfect and grand our memory tells us it was. . . we can only live in the NOW, and embrace the great opportunity we too often take for granted, known as TODAY!” **Mbiyu K. I. Chui**

“We do not exist for ourselves alone, and it is only when we are fully convinced of this fact that we begin to love ourselves properly and thus also love others. What do I mean by loving ourselves properly? I mean, first of all, desiring to live, accepting life as a very great gift and great good, not because of what it gives us, but because of what it enables us to give to others.” **Thomas Merton**

“If it supports the liberation struggle of Black people then it is good. If it is in opposition to the liberation struggle of Black people then it is bad. If it supports the liberation struggle of Black people then it is moral. If it opposes the liberation struggle, then it is immoral. If it supports the liberation struggle of Black people, then it is the will of GOD. If it opposes the liberation struggle of Black people, then it is satanic. With this simple key to the mysteries of life both events and institutions can be judged.”

Rev. Albert B. Cleage Jr.

Inspiration For The Journey

“The true test of faith is how we treat those who can do nothing for us in return.” **Dillion Burroughs**

“Fighting for one’s freedom, struggling towards being free, is like struggling to be a poet or a good Christian. . . You work all day long and achieve some kind of level of success by nightfall, go to sleep, and wake up the next morning with the job still to be done. So you start all over again.

Maya Angelou

“Activism is not a vocation or a calling. It can be the way we live our lives. The choices we make every day. The values we stand for and support. It is not a big deal. It is not extraordinary.” **Angela Davis**

“There is no middle ground! People who say or do nothing are determining their destiny, just as much as those who choose to speak up and stand up!” **Mbiyu K. I. Chui**

“Many people fear nothing more terribly than to take a position which stands out sharply and clearly from the prevailing opinion. The tendency of most is to adopt a view that is so ambiguous that it will include everything and so popular that it will include everybody. Not a few men who cherish lofty and noble ideas hide them under a bushel for fear of being called different.” **Martin L. King Jr.**

“Love as a concrete foundation requires forgiveness. . . Without it, love fails, friendship fails, intelligence fails, humanity fails.” **Aberjhani**

Inspiration For The Journey

“Love all the people you can. The sufferings from love are not to be compared to the sorrows of loneliness.” S. Hale

Prayer for Spiritual Aspiration

Almighty GOD our Redeemer,
Lord, teach us to serve Thee alone,
As Thy divine will would have us to do;
To give fully, and not count the cost;
To fight zealously, and not heed the wounds;
To toil faithfully, and not seek for rest;
To labor willingly, and not ask for any reward,
Save that of knowing that we do Thy Holy will;
This we pray in the name of Jesus,
And for his sake, Amen.

Pastor Mbiga Chai

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