

THE SHAPE
OF **LENT**
AT THE
CHURCH
OF **ST. MARY**
THE VIRGIN
NEW YORK
2024

*At Saint Mary's, we try to preserve the
communal nature of
Lenten practice as a parish family.*

*This booklet provides a description
and schedule of what we will do
together during this holy time.*

*Suggestions for additional Lenten reading
may be found at the end of this booklet.*

INTRODUCTION

Lent, the forty-day period between Ash Wednesday and Easter (Sundays are sometimes excepted), was historically a period of preparation for “catechumens,” persons seeking baptism into the life of the church at Easter. Quite soon, however, it became and it continues to be a time of self-examination, penitence, and special devotion for all Christians as they prepare for the celebration of the Resurrection of Jesus.

Lent is more than just a season of fasting and abstinence; it is a positive opportunity for significant spiritual growth. The Orthodox theologian, Alexander Schmemmann, describes Lent as “the school of repentance which alone will make it possible to receive Easter not as mere permission to eat, to drink, and to relax, but indeed as the end of the ‘old’ in us, as our entrance into the ‘new’ life we have in Jesus.”

Lent, then, is rooted in an essential aspect of what it is to be a Christian: repentance, *metanoia* in Greek, turning one's life around, putting off the old self and putting on of the new self, which is made real by the Resurrection of Jesus. It is an intensification of that movement which should be the spiritual rhythm of our lives: a continuous turning away from sin and reorientation, through grace, toward God.

Lent is about *conversion*.

While we typically think of Lent as a time of fasting and self-denial, we should also approach it as an opportunity for the renewal of those things which form us as believers and strengthen our faith. When we become Christians, we assume a variety of spiritual disciplines so that we will better follow Jesus — we go to Mass, say our prayers, study the Bible and other spiritual classics, make a regular confession, and devote ourselves to good works and reaching out to serve others. During Lent, we should rededicate ourselves to these disciplines and

make them a bit more stringent as a means of restoring vibrancy, life, and passion to our relationship with God. In short, we are hoping to make our hearts and souls bigger, to create more space for God in our lives.

In Lent, we follow Jesus into the wilderness where he was tempted, and we attempt through spiritual discipline to resist temptation ourselves. We pray and proceed with Jesus on the way to Jerusalem and to his Cross on Good Friday. Throughout Lent we focus also on our own wilderness of temptation while keeping an eye toward the Resurrection.

Again from Fr. Schmemmann, Lent is a time of “bright sadness.” *Sadness*, because we focus on the passion and death of Jesus and on the sins of us all which brought him to the Cross. And *bright*, for the promise of Lent is the glory and joy of the Lord’s Resurrection at Easter.

One aspect of Lent which is rarely mentioned nowadays is the communal. In earlier times, Lent was a discipline taken on

by an entire community or even a society. It was something which everyone did together, and the rhythm of life in society was adjusted to support this common discipline. Everyone supported everyone else in the Lenten discipline, and society was so ordered as to make this mutual support possible. One might think of this as a kind of spiritual teamwork, and like anything done as a team it bound people together and helped create community.

In the twenty-first century world in which we live, this has been completely lost. Christianity, since the Reformation, has become a plurality of “christianities,” not bound by common belief or practice. Society has become almost entirely secular, and the rhythm of contemporary life is most often counter to spiritual practice. The communal aspect of Lent has been lost. Or almost lost.

It is this communal aspect we aim to preserve at the Church of Saint Mary the Virgin.

A COLLECT FOR LENT

Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing you have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

THE SHAPE OF LENT

Weekly Fasts & Abstinence

Fasting and abstinence are linked with repentance in Sacred Scripture. When we fast, we are reminded spiritually and even physically of our weakness, our finitude, and our need for God. Each week, we will abstain from a particular pleasure or shortcoming. We may break that on Sundays, which are sometimes thought of as “feast” days in celebration of the Resurrection. Similarly, Fridays during Lent are days when Christians have traditionally abstained from meat, as these days are “little Good Fridays,” which point toward the Friday of Holy Week.

You may choose to do each of the following suggested communal practices of abstinence for one week only; or you may let them build on each other, so that by the end of Lent you are doing all six weekly practices at the same time.

Daily Readings

During Lent we will be reading common Scriptures together. Read the Psalm for the week, and then read and meditate upon the scripture passage given for the day. You may wish to incorporate this in one of the forms for Morning or Evening Prayer found in the *Book of Common Prayer*. These readings will take us through the Seven Last “Words” Jesus spoke from the cross. Each word introduces a theme, which the readings for the week will explore in greater depth.

Easter Vigil

Our Lenten journey together will culminate in the celebration of Jesus’ Resurrection at the Great Vigil of Easter at 7:00 in the evening on Holy Saturday, March 30.

OUR JOURNEY

ASH WEDNESDAY

February 14 - 17

Fast on Ash Wednesday

The First Word (Luke 23.34)

WEEK 1

February 18 - 24

Abstinence: Sweets & Treats

The Second Word (Luke 23.43)

WEEK 2

February 25 - March 2

Abstinence: Unnecessary Spending

The Third Word (John 19.26-27)

WEEK 3

March 3 - 9

Abstinence: Careless Talk & Profanity

The Fourth Word (Mark 15.34)

WEEK 4

March 10 - 16

Abstinence: Alcohol or Coffee

The Fifth Word (John 19.28)

WEEK 5

March 17 - 23

Abstinence: Entertainment & Technology

The Sixth Word (John 19.30)

HOLY WEEK

March 24 - 30

Abstinence: Food or Meals

The Seventh Word (Luke 23.46)

which grants us a sharing in the power of his Resurrection.

The Ash Wednesday Fast

Traditionally, the church has fasted from all food on Ash Wednesday to remind us that our physical hunger for food points to our greater spiritual hunger for God. If you are unable to fast for the entire day, then consider fasting from dinner.

Reading: The First Word

Jesus' first "word" from the cross focuses our hearts on forgiveness and reconciliation with God. Beginning in the Old Testament with the Day of Atonement and the scapegoat, we read how God yearns to forgive us. Moving into the New Testament, we learn from Jesus' own words what it means for us to follow him and become people of reconciliation.

WEEK ONE

February 18 - 24

*Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me
in Paradise.” (Luke 23.43)*

Psalm of the Week 69

Monday Deuteronomy 30.11-20

Tuesday Deuteronomy 5.1-22

Wednesday Romans 3.19-31

Thursday Colossians 3.1-17

Friday Matthew 7.21-29

Saturday Revelation 2.1-7

Abstinence: Sweets & Treats

This week, resolve to deny yourself any type of sweets or dessert. This could mean a latte in the morning or chocolate in the evening. As you do so, notice what happens inside when you are denied something you've become accustomed to or something you really want — even something as inconsequential as dessert or candy.

Reading: The Second Word

Hanging alongside Jesus at his crucifixion were two criminals, fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah 53.12 that he would be “numbered with the transgressors.” One criminal mocked Jesus; the other believed and was assured a place in Paradise. The criminals are reminders that before us lie two ways, two paths — one of obedience, one of rebellion — and we must choose which we will follow.

WEEK TWO

February 25 - March 2

“Woman, behold, thy son!” . . . “Behold, thy mother!” (John 19.26-27)

Psalm of the Week 34

Monday Luke 14.25-33

Tuesday Matthew 12.46-50

Wednesday 1 Corinthians 12.12-31

Thursday Ephesians 2.11-22

Friday Matthew 10.34-39

Saturday Matthew 8.18-22

Abstinence: Technology

This week, forego usual entertainments. Turn off the TV, drive without the radio, put the podcasts aside. Log off Instagram, Facebook, X, TikTok and Substack. Try to check and respond only to necessary emails. What does it feel like to increase the silence? Ask what silence does for you, and spend the time listening for God's voice.

Reading: The Third Word

Jesus reorders our priorities. He didn't mince words — we must put him first if we are to claim him at all. At baptism, we are all made members of one body, the Church, the body of Christ in the world. As disciples of Jesus, the Church owes primary allegiance to God, even over family, tribe, or nation.

WEEK THREE

March 3 - 9

*“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken
me?” (Mark 15.34)*

Psalm of the Week 22

Monday Isaiah 49.1-18

Tuesday Philippians 2.1-11

Wednesday Philippians 2.12-18

Thursday Ephesians 5.1-21

Friday Romans 15.1-7

Saturday 2 Corinthians 8.1-15

Fast: Careless Talk & Profanity

“If any one thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this man’s religion is vain.” (James 1.26)

This week abstain from carelessness in your speech. How easy it is to repeat gossip, to delight in malicious talk, to speak out in anger and wound others with words, to take God’s name in vain. Notice how habitual this talk becomes and resolve to curb it.

Reading: The Fourth Word

On the cross, Jesus feels forsaken by God the Father. He hangs on the cross obeying the will of the one who seems to have abandoned him. There, alone and in an agony of pain and desolation, he bore our sin and reconciled us to God, and this he did out of love for us.

WEEK FOUR

March 10 - 16

“I thirst.” (John 19.28)

<i>Psalm of the Week</i>	42
<i>Monday</i>	Numbers 20.2-13
<i>Tuesday</i>	Psalm 107.1-9
<i>Wednesday</i>	Isaiah 55.1-11
<i>Thursday</i>	John 4.1-26
<i>Friday</i>	Matthew 5.1-16
<i>Saturday</i>	Revelation 7.13-17

Abstinence: Alcohol or Coffee

Choose either coffee or alcohol (or both) and refrain from drinking it this week. If neither is something you regularly enjoy, choose another “staple” in your diet. Pay attention to what happens when you thirst for something you routinely enjoy. Try to pray when you have the desire for the thing from which you are abstaining.

Reading: Fifth Word

The things we hunger and thirst for can become idols, things we desire even more than God. But our souls were made to thirst for God “like the deer pants for streams of water” (Ps. 42.1) Pray that God will reorder our desires so we thirst most deeply for the “living water” only Jesus gives.

WEEK FIVE

March 17 - 23

“It is finished.” (John 19.30)

<i>Psalm of the Week</i>	27
<i>Monday</i>	Genesis 3.1-15
<i>Tuesday</i>	Genesis 15
<i>Wednesday</i>	Ezekiel 36.22-32
<i>Thursday</i>	Isaiah 53
<i>Friday</i>	John 10.7-18
<i>Saturday</i>	Hebrews 10.11-25

Fast: Unnecessary Spending

This week, resolve to spend nothing on yourself except what is absolutely necessary. Buy no new clothes or gadgets, books or music. Resist the impulse buying that is so easy and instant on the Internet. Eat cheaply and save money. Practice living simply and consider giving away the money you save.

Reading: The Sixth Word

The Bible has a single narrative from beginning to end. After the Fall, our sin separated us from God, and God's great project has been to bridge this gap, to repair the rift between us. From the first promises in Genesis, through the prophets, and in the Life of Jesus, God has been at work. At the cross, Jesus pronounced the labor "finished."

HOLY WEEK

March 24 - 30

*“Father, into thy hands I commend my
spirit!” (Luke 23.46)*

<i>Psalm of the Week</i>	31
<i>Monday</i>	Proverbs 3.1-12
<i>Tuesday</i>	Matthew 6.25-34
<i>Wednesday</i>	Mark 9.14-31
<i>Maundy Thursday</i>	John 17
<i>Good Friday</i>	John 18.1-19.30
<i>Holy Saturday</i>	John 19.31-42
<i>Easter Day</i>	John 20.1-18

Fast: Food or Meals

Pick a type of food (like meat or carbs or even all “solids”) and fast from it for the week, or pick a meal to skip entirely on a daily basis. If you skip meals, spend the time you would have spent preparing and eating food to pray, read the Bible or some spiritual classic, or serve others.

Reading: The Seventh Word

Our final readings this week are from John’s gospel, the final hours of Jesus’ life. When we see all that God has done for us, we are free to put our faith in him, to radically trust and abandon ourselves to him. As former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams wrote: “God is to be trusted as we would trust a loving parent, whose commitment to us is inexhaustible, whose purposes for us are unfailingly generous”

LENTEN OBSERVANCES AT SAINT MARY'S

ASH WEDNESDAY

February 14

Said Mass with Imposition of Ashes - 8:00 a.m.

Sung Mass with Imposition of Ashes - 12:10 p.m.

Solemn Mass with Imposition of Ashes - 6:00 p.m.

*Ashes will also be imposed in the Mercy Chapel
8:30-9:30 a.m., 12:45-1:30 p.m.,
5:00-5:45 p.m. & 6:45-8:00 p.m.*

STATIONS of the CROSS

Fridays at 6:00 p.m. following

Evening Prayer at 5:30 p.m.

ADULT FORMATION IN LENT

Sundays at 9:30 a.m.
Led by Fr. Pete Powell

LENTEN QUIET DAY

Saturday February 24 from 9:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.
Led by Sister Monica Clare Powell, CSJB
To sign up, contact jrsmith@stmvnyc.org

CONFESSIONS

Saturdays 11:00 a.m. to Noon, or by appointment.

PALM SUNDAY

March 24

Said Mass at 9:00 a.m.

Solemn Mass with Procession at 11:00 a.m.

THE SACRED TRIDUUM

Maundy Thursday Liturgy

March 28 at 6:00 p.m.

Watch Before the Blessed Sacrament

8:00 p.m. to Midnight on Maundy Thursday

Good Friday Liturgy

March 29 at 12:30 p.m.

The Holy Saturday Liturgy

March 30 at 9:00 a.m.

The Great Vigil of Easter

March 30 at 7:00 p.m.

EASTER DAY

Sunday March 31

Said Mass with Hymns — 9:00 a.m.

Solemn Mass with Procession — 11:00 a.m.

RECOMMENDED READING FOR LENT

Pope Benedict XVI, *Journey to Easter: Spiritual Reflection for the Lenten Season.*

Bread and Wine: Readings for Lent and Easter.

Stanley Hauerwas, *Cross-Shattered Christ: Meditations on the Seven Last Words.*

Fleming Rutledge, *The Crucifixion: Understanding the Death of Jesus Christ.*

Fleming Rutledge, *The Seven Last Words from the Cross.*

Alexander Schmemmann, *Great Lent: Journey to Pascha.*

Samuel Wells, *Power & Passion: Six Characters in Search of Resurrection.*

William H. Willimon, *Thank God It's Friday: Encountering the Seven Last Words from the Cross.*

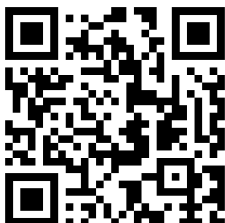
N.T. Wright, *Christians at the Cross: Finding Hope in the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus.*

N.T. Wright, *The Scriptures, the Cross & the Power of God: Reflections for Holy Week.*

PLEDGE

I, _____,
pledge to join with fellow parishioners in
taking upon myself the Corporate Lenten
Discipline described in *The Shape of Lent at
the Church of Saint Mary the Virgin 2024*.
This involves fasting and abstinence, daily
worship, meditation, and the study of Holy
Scripture. I pray that the Grace of God will
enable me and those others who have taken
on this discipline to grow spiritually and to
be bound closer to one another in the
fellowship of Christ's Body at Saint Mary's.

To Access this Booklet Online:



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