

Committing to Lent Fr. Tom Pringle

Hi everyone, Father Tom Pringle here, from the Diocese of Orlando. It's a joy and a privilege to be with you all for this talk on the readings from the first Sunday of Lent. If you'd like to pause this video and go check out the readings for mass from today, I would encourage you to do that so that you can have an idea of the themes that the Lord is inviting us to consider and reflect upon today.

Opening Prayer

But before we dive in, let's begin with a prayer. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen. Heavenly father, as we begin this Lenten season, we ask that you open a space in each of our hearts that allows us to be drawn into a deeper encounter with you. May we experience a renewal in our relationship with you. Help us to identify those areas of our lives where we need repentance. Reveal to us what we need to surrender more fully to you. Allow us to be receptive to the movement of your Spirit. And then commit to following you more closely. Mother Mary be with us throughout this season. And lead us closer to the heart of your Son. And we ask this through Christ our Lord, Amen. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Mark 1:12-15

I'd like to kind of just begin by reading a verse or two from the Gospel that we heard at today's mass. And this is from Mark 1:12-15. It says this, ***"At once the Spirit drove Him out into the desert, and He remained in the desert for 40 days, tempted by Satan. He was among wild beasts and the angels ministered to Him. After John had been arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the Gospel of God. This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the Gospel."***

Imagine, like Jesus, you have been challenged to go out into the desert for 40 days and be tempted. There will be wild beasts, there will be also angels. What would your biggest struggle be? What would you not be able to live without for 40 days? What would you be willing to leave behind? These questions might seem like an outrageous version of a reality TV show, or it may seem relatable to what we've been experiencing throughout this past year with the pandemic. We may actually feel like we've already been in the desert for the past year. Going without interactions with family and friends, travel, or other joys, and comforts that we're typically accustomed to.

Four Things to Consider

So, as we enter into this Lenten season this year, perhaps we're wondering, what more is God expecting us to sacrifice? What additional challenges can we bear? Now is a really good time to pause and check in with ourselves. How are we doing mentally, emotionally, spiritually? Today I'll invite us each to consider four things. The first, identify where we are at the beginning of this Lenten season. Second, surrender the things that are holding us back from fully entering in. Third, received God's love and promises with open hearts. And forth, commit to this Lenten journey. Identify, surrender, receive, commit.

Identify

Let's begin to identify where we are at the beginning of this Lenten season. Any year, the beginning of Lent is a great time to check in with ourselves, check in with our lives spiritually. Where was I at this time one, two, five years ago? This year in a particular way, recalling where we were at the beginning of lent 2020, and acknowledging all that has happened since. Then we may each really need to start this Lent unloading the pain, the frustration, or the disappointment that we've all felt in the past 12 months. Are we struggling with a sense of loss or disappointment? Are there specific things that we're angry about? Are we having struggles in a specific relationship? Or even difficulty with our own mental, physical, or emotional health, or perhaps that of a loved one.

These are important things for us to identify. Just like the you are here dot on a map at a mall or amusement park. We need to clarify for ourselves where we are starting this Lenten journey. So that we can rightly orient ourselves towards where we hope and plan to go. Now, some of us may have had some really joyful things that we have encountered this past year. Being newly ordained, a new job, a new relationship, having experienced family time in a renewed way, or a deepening in our relationship with God.

So, whether we're feeling sorrows, or joys, or the familiar tension that often exists between the two, we start this Lent by bringing all of it before the Lord. Let us not be lulled into thinking we've dealt with enough, or God couldn't possibly ask us to give or sacrifice more. Instead let's reorder our thinking in our hearts. Asking God how we can use this Lenten season, this time set apart, to draw us deeper to Him.

Surrender

Once we've identified where we are, we can then consider what things we need to surrender, or let go of, as we begin this Lenten journey. Contemplating again the imagery of the desert. If God has brought us to a place of desolation, are we using the stillness, and the silence to listen to, and fix our eyes on Him? Have we brought our distractions into the desert with us, and neglected to attune our hearts and minds to what God is speaking to us? The things we need to surrender may

be tangible sacrifices that we often think of when considering our Lenten practice of fasting. Giving up certain foods, or drinks, social media, TV watching, or other things that regularly distract or preoccupy us. However, they could also be emotions, and mental attitudes, or things we currently recognize as obstacles in our personal or work relationships. Our relationship with God, such as resentment, frustration, anger, or disappointment. Think of these things that you desire to surrender, intentionally bring them to prayer.

And I really love the Jesus Prayer. It's an ancient prayer that allows us to keep the name of Jesus on our hearts and minds. And it puts us in a posture of humility. And allows us to ask God, ask Jesus, for His mercy. The Jesus prayer aids us in unceasing prayer. It's a simple prayer, simple to pray. And it's actually my go-to act of contrition. It goes like this, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner. Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner."

Sit with the name of Jesus, His mercy, our sinfulness. Bring to Him in this prayer each thing that you desire to surrender, that you need to surrender. And take as much time as you need, perhaps even doing this simple practice each day throughout this Lenten season. Repeat this prayer. "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner. Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner. Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner." Be perseverant in the things you are surrendering. It's a continual process of choosing to let go of each of these things. Intentionally making room and giving God space in our daily lives, in our minds, our hearts.

Receive

You may be familiar with the prayer analogy of clenched hands. When we're grasping something, we're not able to freely receive. But as we surrender, we open our hands, and are thus able to receive. In this receptivity, we also open our hearts to freely receive what God is bestowing upon us. What are God's promises? In our first reading from Genesis, we hear God's promise of the covenant with Noah. Which is representative of God's promise to all of humanity, to all of us, that He will not forsake us. He will always be with us. His love for us is abundant and unchanging. Take a moment to reflect on whether you truly believe those statements. God will not forsake you. He will always be with you. His love for you is abundant and unchanging. If you're struggling with any of those truths, this may help you to identify areas where you need to renew your trust in God. Do I believe in God's love for me? Do I believe in God's goodness?

Many of us are familiar with the Divine Mercy Saint, Saint Faustina. Saint Faustina Kowalska was a Polish nun, and a mystic, who had several apparitions of Jesus throughout her life. And many of those apparitions were written down and recorded in her journal. And as a result of those recorded journal entries, the church received the incredible gift of the devotion to Divine Mercy. In fact, the very image of Divine Mercy was the result of an encounter Saint Faustina had with Jesus. The words inscribed at the bottom of the Divine Mercy image are "Jesus, I trust in you."

This is another beautiful and simple prayer that we can use for meditation. Think of the areas in your life where you need to trust God more or renew your trust in God's Providence over your life. Reflect and repeat this prayer. "Jesus, I trust in you. Jesus, I trust in you." Bring the areas

you struggle to trust, and with openness of heart, repeat again, "Jesus, I trust in you." As we deepen our trust in God, our receptivity increases. Things that may have been blocking us from fully receiving God's love and mercy are now removed. And our hearts are more abundantly filled with the grace God freely pours out.

Commit

As we begin to ponder everything that we've just reflected on, let's now consider what we are committing to for this Lenten season. The Gospel passage prompts us with these powerful words, "Repent and believe in the Gospel." Our repentance begins as a movement within our own hearts to acknowledge our sin, to seek to detach from it, and free our hearts to receive all that God is pouring out upon us. To believe also begins as a movement of our heart. These interior works then call us toward action. We're tasked with bringing the Gospel outward into a world in great need of God's mercy and love, especially right now. How can we be those instruments that bring God's love to those that we encounter on a daily basis?

And so, to recap, identify, surrender, receive, commit. Identify where you are. Be honest with yourself about what you need to let go of and surrender to God. Receive his promises, receive his love. Repent and believe. I pray this is a fruitful reflection for you as we embark on this Lenten journey together.

Closing Prayer

I'd like to close with sharing a short portion from today's second reading from 1 Peter 3:18. It says this, ***"Beloved, Christ suffered for sins once. The righteous for the sake of the unrighteous, that He might lead you to God."*** May our commitment, our prayer, and our sacrifice this Lenten season lead us closer to God. He desires to unload our burdens, to heal our pain. Let us give thanks to Him for all that He has already done in our lives. And in surrender, ask Him where He's leading next. And in trust, follow Him there.

Let's close today by praying the Jesus Prayer together. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen. Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.