The Achievements of William Crawford Gorgas

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From an obscure frontier surgeon George Crawford Gorgas became internationally acclaimed as a preventive medicine genius. By his initiative in translating the known scientific facts made possible during the blossoming of bacteriology, he performed service not only in the United States but in Cuba, Central and South America, South Africa, and Eastern Europe. He fought for 10 years successfully against yellow fever, malaria, and other diseases during the construction of the Panama Canal, and continued triumphs against disease in other world situations. This is a rather concise account emphasizing his continued devotion and dedication as a humanitarian. He fashioned the Army Medical Department into an efficient machine as Surgeon General, and following his amazing military career of over 38 years, made further contributions in preventive medicine with the Rockefeller Foundation.

William Crawford Gorgas (1854–1920) was renowned as one of the world’s greatest experts in preventive medicine (Fig. 1). His contributions spanned the era referred to as the golden age of the Army Medical Corps, from the beginning of the term of Surgeon General George Sternberg in 1893 and ending with the retirement of Surgeon General Gorgas in 1918. The Association of Military Surgeons of the United States (AMSUS) engraved his name forever by establishing the prestigious Gorgas Medal in his honor in 1916. The medal (Fig. 1, inset) has since been given annually “for the best paper showing original research in preventive medicine,” although since 1942 AMSUS has also presented the award “to an individual for distinguished work in preventive medicine.”

Except for references in a recent book on the history of the Army Medical Department, there have been few articles in recent years to describe the achievements of this great humanitarian, although his name is perpetuated through the international studies in tropical medicine at the Gorgas Memorial Institute, which has been active for over 65 years. Previously located at Alcon, Panama, it is now housed at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

It is hoped that this brief account of Gorgas’ achievements will add luster to the Gorgas Medal of AMSUS and enlighten the membership of the organization regarding the remarkable contributions for all humanity of one of its most famous members. He was born in Mobile, Alabama, on October 3, 1854, the son of General Josiah Gorgas of the Confederate Army, and he graduated from the University of the South at Sewanee, Tennessee, in 1875, where his father was then president. In 1880 Gorgas finished his medical training at Bellevue Medical College in New York, after being turned down for an appointment to West Point. He received his commission as surgeon in the Army on June 16, 1880, remaining on active duty for over 38 years.

He was to spend many years at frontier outposts such as Fort Brown, near Brownsville, Texas, and Fort Randall, North Dakota, near the Canadian border. Prior to eventual service in Cuba in July 1898, he served for 10 years at Fort Barrancas, Florida, where he was able to enhance his knowledge of infectious diseases. His first test as a young medical officer was a yellow fever epidemic at Fort Brown. He became seriously ill from the disease, which gave him immunity from yellow fever; thereafter he would be called to fight outbreaks of the disease, launching his great career in preventive medicine.

In 1893 the United States was entering a period of great change, and the world of medicine was also rapidly blossoming in Europe following the Civil War. Robert Koch in 1887 was the first to demonstrate that a specific microorganism was the cause of a specific disease, laying down postulates to prove that infectious agents transmit diseases such as typhoid fever, diphtheria, dysentery, cholera, and gas gangrene—diseases of prime importance threatening the Army’s effectiveness, since the greatest tragedies for troops have been the result of disease. The discoveries of the causative agents of disease enabled physicians to develop effective and efficient approaches to disease prevention.

George M. Sternberg became the eighth Surgeon General since the Civil War in May 1893. He was responsible for the organization of the Army Medical Museum, the forerunner of the present Armed Forces Institute of Pathology, appointing Major Walter Reed its first curator and director. In 1898, problems in Cuba were becoming quite serious, and war was declared against Spain when the battleship Maine was sunk in the waters off Cuba. With the authority from Congress, Leonard Wood, an army surgeon serving President McKinley, and Theodore Roosevelt, then Assistant Secretary of the Navy, organized a voluntary cavalry regiment to be known as the Rough Riders, commanded by Wood, who as a cavalry officer during the Apache uprisings in Arizona had received the Medal of Honor for the capture of Geronimo. These men—Sternberg, Reed, Wood, and Roosevelt—were to become principals in the successes of William Gorgas in his battles with disease, especially yellow fever.

The campaign against Spain began with the landing of troops on June 22, 1898, near Guantánamo. Following fierce fighting, Spain surrendered on July 17. The signing of a formal armistice took place on August 12, with the United States claiming Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines. Wood was appointed by President McKinley as military governor of the conquered Cuba at the termination of the brief war. Disease soon proved a much more relentless enemy than the Spanish, and it was obvious that Cuba was a horrible place to station troops, sanitation being a huge problem. By the end of July, the yellow fever epidemic was causing great panic. Major Gorgas, barely recovering from typhoid fever, was ordered by Surgeon General Sternberg to take command of the newly established yellow fever hospital near Santiago, where yellow fever was rampant. General Wood shortly placed Gorgas in charge of all sanitation programs in Cuba.
Although many studies and several expeditions were made by the United States regarding a possible passage through Central America to join the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, it was the French under Ferdinand de Lesseps, who had successfully built the Suez Canal, that first attempted to construct such a canal.\(^\text{17}\) The heroic effort to build it without locks failed, largely due to disease problems, torrential rains, soil erosion, and poor management.

Home from the Cuban fracas, Theodore Roosevelt, long interested in the possibility of a canal, had noted that the Oregon, one of the first true battleships, steamered off on a perilous race of some 12,000 miles from its station in San Francisco when the Maine was blown up in Havana harbor. Had there been a canal, the journey would have been only about 4,000 miles, requiring a very short trip, rather than the 67 days taken by the vessel around the Horn of South America. There were compelling reasons for the United States to have a canal, since from Spain the United States had acquired the Philippines and had established naval bases in Cuba, Hawaii, Guam, and Puerto Rico.

When Vice President Roosevelt became president after the assassination of McKinley on September 6, 1901, he immediately started earnest planning for the canal, his guiding light being his studies with a member of the faculty of the Naval War College, Alfred Mahan, and Mahan's famous book, The Influence of Sea Power upon History.\(^\text{18}\) The Caribbean Sea was the American Mediterranean, wrote Mahan, and like the Mediterranean, it demanded a canal, such as the French built at Suez. At long last, after considering a canal through Nicaragua, Congress appropriated funds for construction of the canal through Panama in 1903, following the signing of a treaty with Panama.

Having defeated yellow fever in Cuba, Major Gorgas hoped for a new challenge to apply the techniques he developed in Cuba to Panama's intensely hot, tropical jungle, which swarmed with mosquitoes. Encouraged by the recommendations of General Wood, George Sternberg, and the new Surgeon General, Robert M. O'Reilly, he was hoping to be put in charge of sanitation when the canal work began. His former teacher, Dr. William Welch, Dean of the newly established Johns Hopkins Medical School, headed a delegation that included Dr. William Osler to visit President Roosevelt to secure his appointment as Chief Sanitary Officer in Panama.\(^\text{19}\) Gorgas, promoted from Major to Colonel by an act of congress in March 1903, arrived in Panama in September 1904, and his first effort was directed against the mosquitoes carrying yellow fever and malaria.\(^\text{20}\) Despite troubles with incredulous and obstructive superiors, his campaign against these mosquito-borne diseases was most successful, and the epidemic of yellow fever was over by the end of 1905. He likewise dealt with the serious hookworm problem in the area, as well as the serious threats from pneumonia, tuberculosis, and smallpox. For his reward he was elected president of the American Medical Association in 1908. He and his wife Marie were to spend more than 10 years in Panama, and through it all he had to battle troubles with a succession of three chief engineers, including the brilliant Army engineer, Colonel George W. Goethals, the genius who built the canal.\(^\text{21}\) However, Gorgas was given credit for making the intricate engineering feats possible by conquering the terrible disease problems. Finally, the little steamer S.S. Alcon made the initial voyage through the canal on August 15, 1914,\(^\text{22}\) the same day on which vast armies met in combat in the opening battle of World War I. (One must
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The news of Gorgas’s sanitary triumphs in Cuba and Panama spread rapidly to other parts of the world.24 Samuel Evans, an influential South African mine owner, asked Gorgas to go there and study the grave pneumonia problems among the laborers working in the mines. Gorgas, then 60 years of age, made the long trip to Johannesburg, arriving there in November 1913.25 During his 3 months in South Africa, he proposed corrections in living and working conditions by a necessary system of sanitation, thereby alleviating the problem of pneumonia and other diseases. While in Rhodesia, he learned that President Woodrow Wilson had appointed him Surgeon General of the Army following the death of Surgeon General George H. Torey, with promotion to the rank of Brigadier General. En route back to Panama, he was honored to address the Royal Society of Medicine in London. His reception was described by Sir William Osler as “the greatest ever accorded a medical man in England—perhaps of all living Americans he had conferred the greatest benefits on the human race. The whole world, particularly the British Empire, owes him a debt which Britons are proud to acknowledge.”26

Gorgas assumed his new duties as Surgeon General on April 6, 1914, only about 4 months prior to the outbreak of World War I, and 3 years to the day before the United States entered the conflict. On March 4, 1915, in recognition of his achievements in preventive medicine, he was promoted to Major General by a special act of congress, a rank without precedent in the long history of the Army Medical Corps.

He was soon to carefully prepare instructions for sanitary protection of the conquered city of Vera Cruz, at the outbreak of the short war with Mexico. Shortly after the outbreak of World War I, Serbia was in the grip of a devastating typhus epidemic, proven to be carried by the body louse. The Rockefeller Foundation, then in the early days of its worldwide health-improvement program, asked Gorgas to send scientists to Serbia to work out methods for controlling the typhus fever.

As the United States entered World War I, Gorgas was joined by prominent physicians including the Mayo brothers, William Welch, George Crile, and Harvey Cushing in working out details in military preparedness,27 which included the establishment of the Medical Reserve Corps, and giving physicians rank in keeping with their responsibilities and knowledge. Medical mobilization was a huge success, and many medical societies urged President Wilson to retain Gorgas as Surgeon General after he reached the statutory age of retirement, 64, in October 1918. However, Major General Merritt W. Ireland, chief surgeon of the American Expeditionary Forces, was named his successor. Following retirement, Gorgas undertook the full-time project with the Rockefeller Foundation to help solve the horrible sanitation problems in South America, including procedures for destroying the surviving fever reservoir.

In April 1920, Gorgas was en route to Belgium at the request of King Albert to intervene in the yellow fever epidemic in Belgium’s West African colonies. He was conferred the Star of Belgium by the King, and in May was back in London to plunge into a round of conferences with British officials whose assistance he needed for the proposed African trip. The trying rounds of social and official visits caused a stroke from which he was not to recover. At the Queen Alexandra Hospital he was presented the insignia of St. Michael and St. George, one of England’s most coveted distinctions. Gorgas died on July 3, 1920. The funeral took place at historic St. Paul’s Cathedral and included the singing of the “Battle Hymn of the Republic.” He was brought to Arlington National Cemetery for burial following the regular Episcopal ritual on August 16, 1920.28 Rich though Gorgas was in honor and the symbols of the world’s affection, he died a comparatively poor man. He was not to learn of a new vaccine to be used against the proven virus causing yellow fever,29 the disease for which he was best remembered for his many years of combating it so successfully. How happy Gorgas would have been to see this coup de grace administered to the ruthless enemy against which he had fought so valiantly and, in his own way, so successfully.

References


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ELA HEADINGS FORMAT

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Stations of the Cross Word Search

**Directions:** Use the clues in the word search to fill in the names of the fourteen Stations of the Cross listed below.

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J E R U I C
E L A M C R
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1. Jesus is Condemned to ______________
2. Jesus Takes up the ______________
3. Jesus Falls the ______________ Time
4. Jesus Meets His ______________
5. ______________ of Cyrene Helps Jesus Carry the Cross
6. Jesus’ Face is Wiped by ______________
7. Jesus Falls a ______________ Time
8. Jesus Meets the Women of ______________
9. Jesus Falls a ______________ Time
10. Jesus is Stripped of his ______________
11. Jesus is ______________
12. Jesus ______________ on the Cross
13. Jesus’ ______________ is Taken Down from the Cross
14. Jesus is Laid in the ______________
If you grew up Catholic, you’re probably familiar with a lot of practices that take place during Lent. Receiving ashes on your forehead on Ash Wednesday, not eating meat on Fridays, deciding on something you want to “give up for Lent”: these are things you’ve known since you were little. It’s easy to go along when family and friends are doing these things, and not think much about them. But as time passes, we ask new questions about familiar things. We need to know why things are the way they are.

This guide explores the season of Lent, with special attention to why the things we associate with Lent are part of the Church’s experience—your experience—during this time.

LENT IS A SEASON

It’s important to understand that Lent is a season. This may seem obvious, but actually it’s easy to miss. Lent is a season, just like summer, winter, spring, or fall. It’s a period of time in which many things happen.

Why a season? Historically, Lent began in the early Church because of the people who were getting ready to be baptized at Easter. They had to have a special time period set aside for spiritual preparation. Everyone understood that Baptism was an all-important, once-in-a-lifetime event. Those getting ready for it knew they needed to focus their attention. They had to pray. They had to fast. They had to practice charity. They had to be sure they were ready to give up their old way of life. Those who were already baptized helped them. They shared some of their preparations with them, especially prayer and fasting and giving to those in need.

Gradually, another layer of meaning was added onto Lent. Christians who had committed serious sin repented. They wanted to be received back into the community of faith and forgiven. They needed a period of time to prepare for reconciliation: to repent of their sins, show they were sorry, and change their lives. During the early centuries of the Church, reconciliation was something received only once in a lifetime. It was the one-and-only “second chance” a person had after committing serious sin. Individuals who did something terrible, such as murder or publicly renouncing their faith in Jesus, were known to the community. They could be forgiven, but it was a big deal.

SACKCLOTH AND ASHES

The penitents, as these repentant sinners were called, wore sackcloth and ashes as a sign of their sorrow for sin. They
wanted to be faithful Christians once again. They prayed and fasted and tried to make up for the wrong they had done. The Christian community, for their part, did not sit idly by. They were inspired by the sincerity of these people who wanted so much to return to God’s family and to repair the damage caused by their sin. They helped the penitents, and also tried hard to repent of their own, lesser sins, in order to show their solidarity. Eventually, everybody began to take on at least a few ashes to show that they repented of their own sins, too.

Today we understand that reconciliation can happen more than once. The Sacrament of Penance can be celebrated as often as needed. Still, it is inspiring to remember the journey of reconciliation that happened during Lent in those early centuries.

The historic roots of Lent explain its character. It began as a time to get ready—in a spiritual and authentic way—for both initiation (Baptism), on the one hand, and for reconciliation on the other. In both, it was a whole-community project, in which everybody shared certain disciplines, such as prayer and fasting and giving to those in need.

CONVERSION

Today, Lent remains true to these ancient, two-fold roots. The outward forms have evolved through history, but the inner dynamic of Lent—its spirit—remains the same. For both initiation and Reconciliation, the basic dynamic or spirit can be summed up in a single word: conversion. This is why so many Lenten practices call us to make decisions. Change takes place gradually, by the grace of God, but we have to cooperate with God’s grace. This requires a choice.

When the word conversion is used in the secular world, it might mean any change. But when this word is used to speak of Christian conversion, it means becoming more anchored in our total relationship with God—heart, mind, and action. Conversion is never just a “turning away” from something. It is always a “turning toward” something or, better yet, Someone. Lent calls us to turn toward God, to receive his grace, and to respond by the way we live.

Christian living is always new as we continue to change and grow through life. That is why we need the season of Lent every year. Lent is a time set aside to renew our conversion, to turn to God afresh—today. This may look different from when we were younger, or even how it looked just one year ago.

ASHES

When ashes are traced on your forehead on Ash Wednesday, the minister says some words. By reflecting on these words, we can better understand what the ashes mean.

Here’s the first of the two alternatives that the priest or minister might use:

*Repent, and believe in the Gospel.*

These words capture the spirit of conversion exactly. To repent, or turn away from sin, is to make a commitment to move toward the light of God’s goodness and truth. Our misplaced priorities, our bad habits, our failure to love God and neighbor as we should: these things need to be identified and addressed. Yet that is only part of the story. The second part of this sentence puts forward the positive side of what we have to do: believe in the Gospel. The
Gospel of Jesus Christ is the good news of God’s love for the world, and for each and every person. Believing in the Gospel means letting that good news color every aspect of your life. It means joining God in loving people, and being generous with them.

The ashes are traced on your forehead in the sign of the cross. This sign reminds us that the way of discipleship always includes the cross. We share in Christ’s death and resurrection by dying to self and living for God. This may sound somber, but actually it is good news. If we live for ourselves, let’s face it, we will have a pretty small life. But if we live for God, we take part in the great drama of salvation that reaches to the ends of the earth. The whole universe is ours, when we belong to Christ.

The other words that might accompany the giving of ashes are:

Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.

In the Book of Genesis, God formed the first human being out of the clay of the ground. The “dust” was formed by God’s own hands into a human person. The life of humanity is the “breath” of God himself. Wisdom begins by knowing who we are. We are creatures, not the Creator.

This statement also makes us think about our mortality—not a comfortable thought. Yet if we hear it in the right spirit, it can help us to focus on what is really important in life. Is our whole life bent on seeking things that will pass away—worrying about our appearance, achievements, or possessions? It’s natural to want to look good, do well, and have nice things. But when we die, none of this will matter. What will matter is the time, love, and energy we have invested in our relationship with God, and how we have loved our neighbor. These words: “Remember that you are dust...” should jump-start a reaction in us: to put more time and attention into what is really important.

The ashes are made from the burnt palms of last year’s Palm Sunday procession. What a vivid sign of how glory and honor in this world come down to nothing in the end! Yet God is eternal.

Prayer

F inding more time for prayer is one of the best things you can do for your spiritual life during Lent.

Prayer is always in season, yet Lent is a special time to give more attention and time to prayer. There are many ways to pray, of course, but key to all of them is the step you take simply by saying “Yes, I am going to pray more this Lent.”

Traditional Lenten practices that can encourage prayer are: frequent Mass attendance, praying the Liturgy of the Hours, receiving the Sacrament of Penance, and participating in devotions.

SUNDAY MASS

Mass on Sunday is essential because the liturgy is the central celebration of our faith. As Lent begins, do a self-check. Do you go to Mass every Sunday? What is your attitude toward going? Do you pray the Mass, or are you “somewhere else” in your thoughts even while physically present in church?
If your self-check shows there is room for improvement, don’t be discouraged! There are many ways to enhance your prayer at Mass. Lent is a great time to try one or several of them. Here are a few:

- Preview the Scripture readings and prayers for the upcoming Sunday and ask, “What is the message for me today?” Think about one message you hear, among many. Let it resonate in your spirit. You can find the Scripture readings here: [www.usccb.org/bible/readings/](http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/)

- Get to church a bit earlier than usual and open your heart to God, giving thanks for the good things of the preceding week. Put your personal needs before God in silent prayer before Mass begins.

- Participate in a *Living the Eucharist* discipleship group for teens. Sharing faith with others in your age group can be enlightening and will make a difference in how you pray at Sunday Mass.

Whatever helps you to participate more fruitfully in Sunday liturgy, make an effort to do it during Lent. The readings, rites, and themes of the liturgy are rich during this time.

You will probably pray for the elect in your parish, as they prepare for Baptism at the Easter Vigil. There are special liturgical rites for them on the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Sundays of Lent, in which you will participate as part of the congregation. The elect need our prayers. They also offer something to us: the witness of their sincere desire for Baptism into Christ Jesus. They need our example of faith in return.

**WHAT’S MISSING DURING LENT?**

Some things that are in the liturgy the rest of the year are NOT present during Lent. The Alleluia is gone. The Glory to God disappears. Decorations are kept to a minimum. The music of Lent is less festive than at other times of the year. Many parishes cut back on the use of musical instruments. In fact, the whole atmosphere of the liturgy is altered to become more quiet, reflective, and sober. The penitential color, purple, predominates. The Fourth Sunday of Lent is a little more cheerful (rose-colored vestments, flowers, and some festive music is permitted), but for the most part Lent is a down-to-essentials, serious time.

The absence of the Alleluia and the presence of the color purple are not just window-dressing. They really matter. Why? Because the liturgy sets the tone for our whole experience of the season. When the liturgy feels different through these outward signs, we know something significant is supposed to happen within us, too. The changes, you may have noticed, all have a certain seriousness or gravity. By making room for more silence and reflection, the liturgy is encouraging us to become more aware of our need for conversion. By removing some of the joyful expressions from our worship, we become
aware of the empty space—in our hearts and in our lives—where we long for God. This is a holy longing, and we need to get in touch with it during Lent.

**DAILY MASS AND THE LITURGY OF THE HOURS**

Participating in the Eucharist on weekdays as well as on Sundays can be a great way to deepen your prayer life. If daily Mass is available and you can go, do it. It’s a way to grow closer to Jesus and be strengthened in faith.

The Liturgy of the Hours is a beautiful expression of daily prayer, centered on the psalms. Some parishes celebrate Morning and Evening Prayer all year. Others schedule it only during certain seasons, such as Lent. It can also be prayed alone.

**THE SACRAMENT OF Penance**

As Lent unfolds, and we focus on our desire for a fresh encounter with the living God, we begin to examine our conscience and ask, “Where are my roadblocks?” The Sacrament of Penance is a wonderful opportunity to get past those roadblocks and experience forgiveness, joy, and peace. Many parishes offer, sometime during Lent, a communal celebration of reconciliation, with time for individual confessions. Individual confessions can also be made at the regularly scheduled time in the parish, or by appointment with a priest.

When you receive absolution after you have confessed your sins, notice the profound words the priest says:

*God, the Father of mercies,*  
*through the death and resurrection of his Son*  
*has reconciled the world to himself*  
*and sent the Holy Spirit among us*  
*for the forgiveness of sins;*  
*through the ministry of the Church*  
*may God give you pardon and peace,*  
*and I absolve you from your sins*  
*in the name of the Father, and of the Son,*  
*and of the Holy Spirit.*

The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ—the Paschal Mystery—is the foundation of reconciliation. There’s no better time to celebrate this sacrament than when we are getting ready for Easter.

**LENTEN DEVOTIONS**

Devotions help us to relate to the mysteries of salvation on a feeling level. One of the most popular devotions among Catholics during Lent is the Stations of the Cross. It is a way to meditate on the episodes of the Passion, and to see how the walk of our own life brings us into step with the redemptive suffering of Jesus. There are various ways to practice this devotion. Some are subdued and quiet. Others are bold and creative—including drama, music, and reflections on contemporary issues. Many parishes pray the Stations of the Cross on the Fridays of Lent.

Other Lenten devotions include: reading the Passion of Christ in Scripture, watching Passion Plays, singing Lenten hymns, veneration of the cross, processions with the cross, devotions to the wounds of Christ or to one of the specific incidents of the Passion, and the *Via Matris,* based on the seven sorrows of Mary.
PRAYER IN SECRET

There is more to Lent than public observances. We must follow the advice of our Lord in the Gospel when he says, “When you give alms, do not blow a trumpet before you… Do not let your left hand know what your right is doing” (Matthew 6:2–3). His advice concerning prayer is similar: “When you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you” (Matthew 6:6).

Fasting and Abstinence

On two days of the year, Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, all Catholics who are able to fast are asked to do so. Fasting means eating only one full meal. If necessary, you can eat two smaller meals, too, but basically it’s one meal, and no snacks or munching through the day. Voluntary fasting also can take place on other days. For example, everyone is encouraged to fast on Holy Saturday, though it’s not required.

REASONS FOR FASTING

Why fast? Fasting is an ancient discipline practiced by Christians through the ages. It’s tempting to see fasting as a kind of diet, but that’s not what it’s about. Our fasting has a spiritual purpose. By foregoing food for a time, Christians affirm: “One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). We fast to clear our mind and to turn our thoughts to God. That is why Jesus fasted in the desert, and why many people fast today.

Although the ultimate purpose of fasting is spiritual, there is also something very physical about an empty stomach. What do we make of this? When we fast, we experience hunger. We are voluntarily sharing a feeling that millions of people know when they are deprived of food—because of poverty, natural disaster, or war. Compassion for those who lack the necessities of life can arise out of our experience of fasting.

ABSTINENCE ON LENTEN FRIDAYS

Abstinence means not eating meat. Abstinence from meat is expected of all Catholics on Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, and all the Fridays of Lent. Why not eat meat? Traditionally, meat has been considered a luxury food, so not eating meat is linked to “simple fare” and solidarity with the poor.

For many people today, giving up meat isn’t a huge sacrifice in itself. What is challenging is remembering to do it. Above all, it requires being mindful that Fridays are special, which leads us back to the spiritual purpose of the exercise. Why abstain on Fridays? In the cycle of the week, Friday is the day we remember the Passion and death of Jesus, undertaken out of love for all sinners. It’s appropriate to share the symbolic gesture of abstinence as a form of self-denial and penance on that day.

GIVING UP SOMETHING FOR LENT

The practice of “giving up something for Lent” is actually a variation on the theme of fasting and abstinence. It’s a personal decision to practice self-denial in some way that is particular to you. What you give up doesn’t have to be a type of food. It could be anything nonessential that you normally would enjoy.

It should be something you like, however, not something you didn’t want (or want to do) in the first place. Why? Because
the practice is intended to teach us self-discipline. Human beings want things all the time. If we could look inside each person’s heart, we would find a mass of longings, some very confused, all very demanding. The Christian, in order to be truly free, needs to learn how to sort through those longings and master them, so as not to be mastered by them. Have you ever seen a two-year-old throw a tantrum because he wants something? If we don’t learn self-discipline, we remain, on the inside, just like that two-year-old. On the other hand, if we practice gentleness and self-control, little by little we grow more truly free and responsible.

Learning how to give up something, freely and with good grace, is a necessary step toward maturity. But it is also something more. The Lenten practice of self-denial, or “giving up something,” can be an occasion to become a giver.

Most of us have more than we need. Yet when we are focused on our wants, we can end up feeling very needy. Our consumer culture encourages us to always want more. If we practice self-discipline, however, everything looks different. To our surprise, we discover that we have enough. We can afford to be generous. People who give up something for Lent enjoy a fresh opportunity to give something. If you give up some entertainment, suddenly you have that time available. You could help somebody who needs a hand. If you give up sweets or some other treat, guess what? The money you would have spent could make a donation to a charity. And so on.

In short, giving up something for Lent doesn’t have to be a sad experience. It can be a doorway to becoming a happier and more generous person.

New Life at Easter

On Holy Thursday, the Lenten season ends and the Triduum begins. The liturgy marks the change vividly. At the Mass of the Lord’s Supper on Holy Thursday evening, the vestments and altar coverings are no longer purple. Instead, they are festive white. The Gloria returns, with bells! The Alleluia will return only at the Easter Vigil, yet already there is a new atmosphere, clearly different from that of Lent.

Churches are filled with flowers at Easter because they are a sign of new life. The paschal candle burns brightly as a sign of Christ’s risen life. But the greatest sign of new life at Easter is Baptism. The newly baptized, and those who have renewed their baptismal promises, are the bearers of light and life during the Easter season. When you renew your baptismal promises, you too become a living sign that Christ is risen. He is alive!

Here’s how it works. For forty days we’ve followed the disciplines of Lent: praying, fasting, and giving to those in need. We’ve gotten down to basics. We’ve asked for forgiveness of our sins. We’ve realized how blessed we are to have a relationship with a God who loves us. We’ve strengthened our discipleship. These are movements of faith. What we may not realize immediately, however, is that all these movements of faith are building up to something.

That something is Easter—Easter within us, Easter among us, and Easter in the whole world. Even nature takes part in the celebration, as the date of Easter depends on the sun and the moon in the coming of the Spring equinox in the northern hemisphere! When we reach the Paschal Triduum, something profound happens, for which Lent has made us ready: Christ’s victory becomes ours. As St. Paul
says in his Letter to the Romans: “We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life” (Romans 6:4).

After the Resurrection, the first gift of Jesus to his disciples is the Holy Spirit (John 20:22). The Easter season then allows a full fifty days to celebrate the Spirit, to rejoice in the Spirit’s presence in our lives, and to affirm the gifts of the Risen Christ in Word and Sacrament, especially in the Eucharist. The Easter season extends the joy of Easter all the way up to the celebration of Pentecost. Christ is risen indeed—alleluia!

**QUESTIONS FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH**

1. What do you like about the Lenten season? What do you find difficult or off-putting about it? What mood or theme do you associate with Lent at this time in your life?

2. Do you prefer Lenten practices that you share with others, or ones that you pursue on your own? What kind of Lenten experiences “feed” you? Think of a few examples. Are you open to new experiences?

3. Have you ever gone through Lent doing nothing at all to engage with the season? What did Easter feel like after such a Lent? Now recall a Lenten season when you took part in the season actively. What was Easter like after that experience?

4. From what you know through experience and what you have read here, compare Lent and Easter. How are they different? Think of an image or a slogan that expresses that difference for you. Keep that image or slogan in mind as you experience Lent this year, while looking forward to Easter.

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Video: The Fourteen Stations of the Cross

Directions: Watch the video and fill in the blanks below.  
www.thereligionteacher.com/stationsvideo

The Stations of the Cross is also called:

______________________________________________
______________________________________________
______________________________________________

The Stations of the Cross originated out of a desire to go on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem for people who were unable to do so in their lifetime.

What is a pilgrimage?

______________________________________________
______________________________________________
______________________________________________

What are the fourteen Stations of the Cross?

1. __________________________________________
2. __________________________________________
3. __________________________________________
4. __________________________________________
5. __________________________________________
6. __________________________________________
7. __________________________________________
8. __________________________________________
9. __________________________________________
10. _________________________________________
11. _________________________________________
12. _________________________________________
13. _________________________________________
14. _________________________________________
**Penance and the Prodigal Son**

**Directions:** Write the step in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation that connects with each part of the Parable of the Prodigal Son, then answer the questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sin</th>
<th>Confession</th>
<th>Reconciliation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contrition</td>
<td>Absolution</td>
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**Parable of the Prodigal Son**

- **The father gives both sons their shares of his estate, but the younger son leaves and squanders his inheritance. (Lk 15:12-13)**
- **The son realizes he has sinned against his father decides to return home and tell his father to treat him as a servant. (Lk 15:17-19)**
- **His father sees his son returning home and runs to greet him. (Lk 15:20)**
- **The son apologizes for his sins. (Lk 15:21)**
- **The father orders that his son be given new clothes and that there is to be a party to be thrown in celebration of his return. (Lk 15:22-24)**

1. What are some sins that people your age could commit that would be really difficult to forgive?

__________________________________________________________________________________________

2. Have you ever felt like the lost son in the parable? Explain.

__________________________________________________________________________________________

3. Do you think people can experience the same feelings of forgiveness in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation that the lost son felt in this parable? Why or why not?

__________________________________________________________________________________________
Parable Skit
A Modern Parable of the Prodigal Son
Scene 1: How It All Began

Narrator: Once there was a boy named Steve. He lived on a farm with his father and his older brother. His father often said:

Father: I am so happy to have two sons, because when I die, you will each have half of this farm. It is good to know that this farm will stay in the family and provide good things for generations to come.

Chorus: What a loving father! He is happy he has two sons to share with!

Narrator: But one day, the younger son started thinking. He thought:

Younger son: Why do I have to wait years for my share of the farm to come to me? I know what I will do. I was ask my father for my half now. Then I can really start living.

Narrator: So the younger son went to his father. He said to him:

Younger son: Father, you have always said that half the farm would come to me.

Father: Yes, that is right.

Younger son: I would like to have my half now. I want to leave for a far country and start living on my own.

Father: Are you sure that is what you want?

Chorus: Are you SURE that is what you want?

Younger son: Yes, that is what I want.

Father: My advice would be to wait. But, if you are sure, I will do what you ask. You may have half of everything now.

Chorus: What a loving and generous father!

Younger son: Thank you, Father. I will be leaving in the morning.

Chorus: We think you are making a big mistake! Be careful out there!

Scene 2: The Younger Son in a Far Country

Younger son: Well, here I am in a far country! And guess what?
Chorus: What?

Younger son: I spent all my money! I have none left! I spent it on parties and fancy food and fast cars.

Chorus: So you are in trouble now! What are you going to do?

Younger son: I have to get a job.

Chorus: Doing what?

Younger son: I will work for a farmer. I will feed the pigs.

Chorus: Good luck!

Scene 3: The Younger Son at the Pig Farm

Younger son: This is really hard work. And I’m not making much money. It’s hardly enough to eat. I wish I could eat some of the corn that I am giving to these pigs.

Chorus: We told you this whole thing was a mistake!

Younger son: I know what I can do. The hired hands at my father’s farm are better treated than I am now. I will go to my father and say: “Father, I have sinned against God and against you. Please give me a job as a hired hand.”

Chorus: Now you’re back on track! Way to go, Steve!

Scene 4: The Road Back Home

Narrator: The younger son began his long journey home. Finally, he saw his house in the distance.

Younger son: Look! There’s the house! I’m almost there! I can’t wait to tell my father how sorry I am.

Father: Look! I have been watching every day for weeks, and now I think I see my son in the distance. He is on the road and walking toward home!

Narrator: The father couldn’t wait any longer. As soon as he saw his son, he began to run down the road toward him.
**Chorus:** It looks like we’re going to have a happy ending after all!

**Father:** I have been waiting for you, day in and day out, for weeks and weeks!

**Younger son:** But Father . . .

**Father:** Look at you! You must have had a rough time! You need a new coat. Let’s get you a nice ring for your finger and shoes for your feet!

**Younger son:** But Father . . .

**Father:** We’re going to celebrate! You were dead to me, but now here you are alive! You were lost, but now you are found!

**Chorus:** What a wonderful and loving Father! Let’s get this party started!

The End
The Order of the Penitents

**Directions:** Read the brief description of the group of people called the “Order of the Penitents” and answer the questions below.

*In the early Church, the Sacrament of Penance (often called “confession” today) was very different. Instead of confessing sins in private to a priest, a person who had committed serious sins would confess his or her sins to the bishop who would give a penance to be carried out, usually during Lent. Their penances were a set of actions that could include fasting, manual labor for the Church, pilgrimages, and caring for the poor or ill.*

*While the penitents worked through their penances, they were usually distinguished from the rest of the Church community by wearing special clothes, sitting in special places during mass, and by being dismissed after the Liturgy of the Word. At the beginning of Lent, they wore ashes as a sign of their repentance—a practice that all Catholics take part in today.*

1. How did the Order of the Penitents differ from the way we celebrate the Sacrament of Penance today?

2. How were the penitents distinguished from the rest of the Church community?

3. What did the penitents wear at the beginning of Lent as a sign of repentance?

4. Which of these two forms of the Sacrament of Penance would you rather do and why?
Saint Patrick

Directions: Read the biography and answer the questions.

Saint Patrick was born in Britain around 385. He was kidnapped by pirates and taken to Ireland as a teenager to become a slave and shepherd. During his captivity he kept a strong faith in God and prayed daily. After six years of servitude, God led him to escape and return home to England. He became a priest and later bishop, but his heart remained with the people of Ireland. Saint Patrick went back to preach and teach the Celtic people who were lacked Christian faith and believed in druidism. He brought Christianity to the island and worked many miracles there. He used many creative teaching methods to explain Christianity to people who did not know about God. He was best known for his use of a shamrock (three-leaf clover) to teach people about the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. During his time in Ireland he baptized thousands of new Christians and ordained many priests to carry on the missions there. After forty years of preaching the Gospel in Ireland, he died on March 17th, a day people around the world celebrate as Saint Patrick’s Day.

1. How did Saint Patrick teach the Celtic people about God?

___________________________________________________________________________________

2. Saint Patrick brought Christianity to a country that knew very little about Jesus Christ. To whom can you bring the message of good news in our world today? What would you tell them about Jesus Christ?

___________________________________________________________________________________

3. What is one spiritual way you can celebrate the next Saint Patrick’s Day?

___________________________________________________________________________________

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Joseph's Annunciation

Directions: Read Matthew 1:18-24. Just as an angel appeared to Mary in the Gospel of Luke, an angel also appeared to Joseph to announce the birth of Christ in the Gospel of Matthew. Unlike Mary, we never read what Joseph has to say. Write what he might have said in response to his encounter with the Angel.