

LENTEN MEDITATION

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A devotional work exploring church and personal spiritual transformation.

5 Chapters

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Lenten Meditation

Lenten Meditations

Moses and the Journey from Slavery to the Promised Land

The Journey and Growth of Our Church

The story of Moses is the story of a leader leading a large group of ordinary people with a glorious variety of human weaknesses and sins to a destination that he does not know. It is the story of a community that struggles with God, its leaders, and its individual members to become a people of God, a community of faith and love. It is the story of a miracle of transformation over forty years. After this time the community is still imperfect but they have made a start and are growing even if it is three steps forwards and two steps back. Thirty-three centuries later, the story still continues. The people of God, the Church, continues to grow, implode, explode but is inevitably being drawn to a Promised Land that we can sense more by faith than by sight. It continues to be our journey as individuals and as a community. It is the greatest of journeys and defines the meaning of our lives.

During the forty days of Lent, let us read the story of Moses and the birth of the people of God and apply it to our own lives and Church. At Easter, the end of the Lenten pilgrimage, may we find transformation as we see in a clearer manner the glorious Promised Land that is being offered to us as our lasting home.

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Day 1- Hebrew Slavery-What Are We as Individuals and Church Enslaved To?: Read Exodus 1:8-22

Moses' kindred were physically slaves in Egypt and suffered greatly at the hands of their earthly taskmasters. We are all slaves to sin, held

in bondage by our own desires, drives and devils. We may think that we are free but we are not. Only as we reflect on this truth and try to free ourselves of our vices do we really realize that what may have been a choice is now a compulsion and a bondage. How do we get free as individuals and as a Church? The first step is awareness.

Contemplate your vices and the sins of your Church using a list or the Decalogue in the Book of Common Prayer or read Deuteronomy 20. Look beyond the words to the level where you, or your Church, actually break the commandments. For example, I may not kill someone but, do I wish someone dead? Do I wish them injured? Do I wish them misfortune? Do I murder their characters? List below the main sins that are in your shadow'. List below the main sins of our Church. Pray prayers of repentance for these sins.

Day 2- The Birth of A Future Leader- Birth and Adoption of Moses: Read Exodus 2:1-22

God did not leave His people in slavery but chose to deliver them over time through an inspired leader. The future leader is constantly threatened with death by evil and the powers of the world but survives, despite all odds, by the grace of God and the obedience of His servants. While Moses grows to manhood, the people of God remain in slavery.

Moses murders an Egyptian that was beating a Hebrew, hides him in the sand, and flees to Midian.

In what ways are we inspired? In what ways are we still growing to a mature adulthood? Why would God choose a murderer to lead his people? Do I use the grace of God to build up and protect my Church and her leaders or do I tear them down? How can God use me despite my sins/weaknesses? Am I willing to be a servant in order to become a leader?

Day 3- The Call to a Mission: The Call of Moses: Read Exodus 2:23-4:17

God revealed Himself to Moses in a burning bush and sent him to face Pharaoh to deliver the Israelites out of Egypt. Moses is dumbfounded! He couldn't even speak well due to a speech impediment. What kind of leader could he be? He has many excuses against his knowing his own sins, weaknesses and lack of personal power. God, however, has a vision for Moses and will empower him. Moses argues with God; God becomes angry with Moses, yet God promises help from Aaron and with the staff. We as individuals and Church are called to become people of God, to grow to a fuller life of love and service. We are each given a unique purpose from God. It is impossible!' we say. We are only ordinary people and have no special talents or gifts. We also have numerous flaws.' Like Moses, we are afraid. All true. But, is God trustworthy? How has he brought people and gifts into our lives to assist us? Unless we attempt the impossible (by human standards), we will never know what the power of God will enable us to do.

What purpose am I called to? In what ways will I need to be empowered to do it? What mission is our Church called to? What do we need for the task? Do I (we) believe that God will give us what we need to do our tasks? Will I do my part? Does it matter to God if I do nothing? What am I unwilling to give up to further God's plan for my life?

Day 4- Hindered by the World, the Flesh and the Devil: Pharaoh's Obduracy: Read Exodus 4:29- 5:21

When Moses and Aaron brought the elders together, they related all the Lord had told them. They performed signs before the people and they believed and bowed down and worshipped.

Once the mission is set in motion, the many forces that want it to fail come rushing in. The lure of wealth (the world), bodily pleasures (the flesh) and power (the devil) seek to destroy the good work. In this

reading, Pharaoh represents the devil, the lure of power, trying to take the place of God. (Who is the Lord? Even if I knew the Lord I would not let Israel go!) God's plan seems to make life immeasurably harder for the Hebrews as they are forced into an even deeper slavery than before the mission.

Did you ever notice that when the Lord is working with you to do a beautiful good work that there is always something there to make it ugly such as the need for recognition, influence, love, status, financial gain among others? This is certainly true in the Church. The aim of the enemy is to pervert the holy.

Would I believe the signs? Do I come before the Lord with an attitude of worship?

Do I only seek to have my needs met, or pray for others and the Church?

In what ways are my good works, my mission, spoiled by my ego?

What about wealth, pleasure and/or power hinder my relationship with the Lord?

Day 5- God Reveals His Will Over Time: Renewal of God's Promise: Read Exodus 5:22-6:14

As conditions get worse for the Israelites, Moses spends more time talking and listening to the Lord. The Lord reveals more about what He has in mind for the people. It is only in obedience to God's will and discovering his need for God's help that Moses is slowly learning to rely on God and His promises. He is learning that God will only reveal His will and plans slowly over time as he tries to obey the divine command. On the other hand, the Israelites refused to listen to him because of their discouragement.

Do you try to see the future before you will act? The Lord rarely gives this kind of information in advance, especially in personal matters. He invites us to obey and gives information as needed. He is teaching the

absolute necessity of faith and obedience.

Does the Church, the Vestry, worry too much about the ends and means and not the mission, trusting that God will provide for his needs as we put our faith into practice? Am I able to overcome my laziness and inertia? Does discouragement or pressures block us from hearing God? What is the spiritual antidote to discouragement? How can I help others in their discouragement?

Day 6- Suffering and the Purifying Fire: The Plagues: Read Exodus 7:14-11:10

The Lord tries to purify the Egyptians through suffering. Bloody drinking water, plagues of frogs, gnats, flies and locusts, pestilence, devastating hail, blinding darkness and finally, the killing of the first born- all meant to get a people to understand that neither their leader, Pharaoh, nor the gods of Egypt are the one, only and true God. The suffering is progressive. God only uses the worst plagues as the lesser ones fail to correct.

How does God use suffering to change you and the Church? I know personally that God will try to get my attention as with a tap on the shoulder. If that doesn't work He will use a rubber hammer. If I am still obstinate He will progressively use a jeweler's hammer, a ball peen hammer, an eight pound sledge and finally, if I am really obstinate, the jack hammer of depression or some other devastating turmoil. By that time, I'm too battered to struggle anymore and I give in. As I get older I realize that I don't thrive on pain like I did when I was younger and nowadays a rubber hammer hurts enough to get my attention.

How does God get the attention of the Church when it is off track and fails to recognize the true God? (Some symptoms may include loss of membership, factions, destruction of brotherly love, destruction of the church buildings, sickness of members among many others methods.) How

does God use suffering to get my attention? Have I learned from these times of suffering? What kind of suffering is needed to be purified by the fire? How do these sufferings relate to the sins identified in the Day 1 meditation above?

Day 7- The Central Event of Our Faith: The Passover of the Lord: Read Exodus 12:1-36

The Lord is ready to reveal His glory to the Hebrew people. He is ready to set His people free through an event that will live in the memory of the people as a perpetual pinnacle of their faith. The killing of the first born indicated clearly to Pharaoh (and the real ruler of this world, Satan) that his days were numbered and that the beginning of the end of the war against evil had begun. The Hebrews had only to watch, remember, and pass on the knowledge of the Passover, symbolized as the shed blood of an innocent lamb, to their children as a memorial of how much the Lord loved them.

In the Church, the true meaning of the Passover lamb is a prefigurement of the shedding of the blood of Jesus, the Lamb of God, as the ultimate act of love for us and the ultimate center of our faith. The war against evil has been won. Satan knows he is a defeated enemy. We need to claim our victory. We need to remember and pass on the continuing story of how much the Lord loves us.

How important is the Passover of the Lamb of God to me and my faith?

How can I pass on the testimony of my faith to my children, grandchildren, and those around me?

Read Revelation 7:9-16. How does this relate to the Passover? What does it mean to me to be saved by the blood of the Lamb?

Day 8- Baptism and the Church: The Crossing at the Red Sea: Read Exodus 13:1-14:31

Like Noah's Ark, the crossing at the Red Sea was a salvation for those

who obeyed but a judgment on those who refused to listen to the Lord. Those in the Ark survived but those who would not make the choice to come aboard the Ark were drowned due to their own free will decision. Any Egyptians who escaped and traveled with the Hebrews were saved at the Red Sea but those who chose to remain an enemy of the Lord were destroyed by their own willfulness.

The Ark is a metaphor for the Church. Those within the saving embrace of the Church are being protected from many evils; most which you may not even recognize or be aware of. The Ark houses the holy. As the Hebrews still suffered while being in the presence of the Lord, we too-- those rallied behind the Banner of the Son of Man-- also experience suffering. The suffering is a purification and sanctification, the correction of His children by a loving Father.

Those outside the Church experience the suffering as a judgment, condemnation, and destruction. How we experience the purifying fire of God is our choice!

Do I recognize that I am protected by the Lord? Do I know of any evils that would have harmed me had I not sought His protection? Does it give me the courage to grow and be of service knowing that redeemed suffering is meant to heal us, not harm us? How can I cooperate with the purifying process?

Day 9-Bread From Heaven: Feeding in the Desert: Read Exodus 16:1-36

The Hebrews were in the desert; a place of desolation, deprivation and death even if one was prepared for life there. The food that they took in their great haste to leave Egypt, mostly unleavened bread, was nearly gone. They began to grow fearful and wished that they were back in the slavery of Egypt where they were provided "all the food they wanted" in their slavery. They grumbled against Moses. He showed them that they were not grumbling against Moses and Aaron, but against the

Lord. Moses was provided manna to feed God's people and to test them. Today, the Lord provides us with the spiritual food that is His body and blood to nourish us in the desert of our barren and generally spiritually lifeless culture. All around us people are spiritually starving as they try to make a meaningful life in a culture which provides no meaning or sustenance for their lives.

Do you recognize that you are being fed and given life by the Lord? Do you recognize the emptiness in what the world considers important? Do you try to invite those starving souls into your spiritual home where they can be fed and flourish like plants along the banks of a river?

Read John 6:41-59.

How does God's gift of manna help you understand God's gift of his Son? What does it mean that Jesus is the living bread which came down from heaven?

Day 10- What Quenches Our Spiritual Thirst?-Water from the Rock: Read Exodus 17:1-7

Even more important and basic than food in the desert wilderness is water. The Lord provided drink for the Hebrews from the seemingly barren rock.

Today, we thirst not so much for water but for meaning for our lives.

As it says in the prophet Amos (8:11-12): "The days are coming says the Lord when I shall send a famine on the country, not for water but for hearing the word of God. People will stagger from sea to sea searching for the Lord's word but will not find it." Everywhere, people spend their lives in busyness doing things which provide no lasting pleasure, no nurturance, no real security, trying desperately to fill a void that can only be filled by the love of God.

Does your Church provide that which will quench your thirst? Do you try to quench your thirst with the broken water jars of our secular

culture? How well does that work? Can you provide spirit quenching meaning to neighbors and friends by inviting them in from the great spiritual desert into the abundant life of Christ?

Read John 4:7-14. How does Jesus satisfy thirst?

Day 11- Lay Ministry & Spiritual Gift Development: Sharing the Burden: Read

Exodus 18:13-27

Moses tried to carry by himself the full weight of the burden of the 600,000 adult Hebrews who left Egypt! Does this sound like a prescription for burnout? Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, certainly thought so and gave him advice that is wise and empowering to this day: delegation. He told Moses to appoint wise and God-fearing persons who were trusted by the people to handle the majority of legislative and administrative matters that came up while submitting to Moses the cases that were too difficult for them. This left Moses free to perform the tasks of leadership without wearing out both himself and his people. It also trained people to use their gifts.

Today, while we don't have many congregations that even come close to the size of Moses', the task of leadership remains the same: train future leaders, delegate tasks based on which gifts of the spirit an individual has, consult the Lord through prayer, administer the Eucharist and sacraments, exhort and provide inspiration and guidance. How much of the delegated work that our leaders offer do I accept as my own obligation? Do I realize that I will develop my talents and spiritual gifts by accepting these tasks? Does the Church have a good system for identifying and developing the gifts of its members? What do you imagine some of the qualities and characteristics sought by Moses in selecting "capable leaders?"

Day 12- The Need to Experience God: The Great Theophany at Sinai: Read Exodus

19:1-25; 20:18-21

Earthquakes! Shaking Mountains! Smoke and Thunder! Lightning and

Deafening Trumpet Blasts! All of these phenomena accompany the descent of the Lord on Mt. Sinai. The event is so holy and tremendous that anyone or any animal that touches the mountain must be put to death either by stoning or arrows. No one may even touch them! The Lord wanted the Hebrews to remember this meeting and did anything that would imprint it on their collective minds. Thirty-three centuries later it is still vivid! God has come to a people.

Moses met with God and received instructions for the people. He was told to consecrate them. They were to wash themselves and prepare to come to the mountain of the Lord.

Moses spoke and the Lord answered him. The people stayed at a distance. They feared death if they heard God's voice. The fear of God was with them to keep them from sinning.

What is the difference between fear of God and being afraid of God? Are we afraid to get too close to God? Do we stand far off while others get close to God and hear His voice?

Day 13- Guide for Behavior: The Ten Commandments: Read Exodus 20:1-26

The Ten Commandments are a kind of summary of the legislation that will follow in the Books of Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers. These are the key demands of any relationship with God; they cover duties toward God and toward one another, and are limited to ten for easy teaching to children who can count them on the fingers. .

Today, we continue to use them as a guide to our behavior but in a deeper way than spelled out in Exodus. We may not kill, but do we get angry with others? We may not commit adultery but do we lust? We may not think we worship other gods but do we love money or our looks too much? We may not bear false witness against our neighbor in a legal sense but do we slander them? We may not overtly steal but do we cheat on our taxes? We may go to Church on Sunday but do we really honor the

Sabbath?

Spend some time thinking about these deeper meanings of the Commandments that you began on Day 1. Skim through Chapters 21-23 of Exodus to get a fuller flavor for how the laws were applied and what would happen if they were disobeyed. Remember that to the Israelites the Law was not originally a burden, but a gift from God to His chosen people. How did they misunderstand this gift? Do we misunderstand this gift?

Day 14- Covenant of Blood and Meal: Ratification of the Covenant: Read Exodus 24:1-18

"This is the blood of the Covenant which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all of these words of His." With these words the people give their full assent with the divine offer of a covenant and sealed with two rituals: the sprinkling of the blood of a sacrificial lamb and a covenantal meal where the elders banquet with God. It is the culmination of the whole covenant process: purification (Ex. 19:1-25), summary of covenant (Ex: 20:1-21), the covenant code (Ex: 21-23) and covenant ratification (Ex. 24:1-18). The scapegoat, the innocent lamb, is sacrificed.

"This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me. This is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in memory of me." Today, we celebrate the new covenant of the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharistic meal. As it was thirty-three centuries ago, so it is today: remember, enact, and partake of the sacred feast. The innocent Lamb of God offers Himself as the Sacrifice. Do I recognize the new covenant as a perfection of the old? What is important about the shedding of blood? What is important about a shared meal? Do I give proper honor and thanks when I partake of the Eucharist? Do I take the Eucharist lightly? Why is it critical that I

partake often of the Eucharist?

Day 15- The Power of Intercession: The Golden Calf: Read Exodus 32:1-35

The Golden Calf was not meant to be a "false god" but an image of the Lord, which the Hebrews were forbidden to make. They imaged a calf/bull to represent a god of strength. The people were so used to idolatry that it is not likely that they understood in their hearts and minds the difference between an image, a false god, and the real God. In addition, there was much revelry in the camp which implied that much partying was going on (the Flesh). Finally, it is apparent that no one was willing to wait on the Lord's timing by waiting for Moses to return from his visit with God and thus took matters into their own hands. God believed that the people were unteachable and wanted to raise up a new people to replace them. Moses interceded with God for the people, standing in the breach, and God listened to him. Moses reminded God of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God relented and did not destroy the people.

Why did people rebel against God and the leadership of Moses? How was Aaron an unfaithful leader?

Today, God still desires to make us a holy people. Often we make God in our own images, making Him less than He is. We then become much less than we are created to become. We are all called to talk with God and intercede for others as Moses did for the Hebrews in the desert. Our prayers may soften hearts, open the doors to grace, and allow God's love to raise them up to Himself. There is always hope!

Do I pray for others regularly? Have I learned to pray as well as to intercede? Am I sure that I can distinguish between an image, a false god and the true God? Am I learning patience by learning to wait on God's time to act?

Day 16- Prayer and Meditation: Moses' Intimacy With God: Read Exodus 33:7-34:8,

34:27-35

Moses spoke face-to-face with God and was called God's friend. This intimacy was developed through long periods of prayer coupled with the extreme humility of Moses. This humility and prayer enabled Moses to become one of the great prophets/leaders, in the entire history of the Jewish faith.

Today, we are all called to this kind of intimacy with the Father, through Jesus' name by way of the Holy Spirit. It is still accomplished through humility, the king of virtues, and long periods of prayer and meditation. Humility is not humiliation although at times I need to be humiliated to get back on track. Humility (the opposite of pride, one sin of Satan) is found in recognizing that I am not God but only a limited and imperfect created being called to be a son of God. Long periods of prayer (talking to God) and meditation (listening to God) enable one to live up to this calling. The Church is also to be humble, a people on their knees in prayer.

How often do I still try to play "god" in my life instead of submitting myself to my loving Creator? How much time do I spend in prayer? How much time in meditation? Has my intimacy with God grown over the years? In what ways has it grown?

Day 17- Life As A Journey: Departure from Sinai: Read Numbers 10:11-12, 33-36

Moses and the people left Sinai in the second year of their journey.

They traveled in stages as the Lord prompted them; staying as long as He wanted them to stay. The people were to learn obedience by listening to and following the instructions of the Lord on a day-to-day basis.

Only in this way could faith in God be cultivated.

We are to learn and grow on our life's journey by trusting God on a day-to-day basis as well. In general, over time, we are to learn to grow in our relationship with ourselves, others and God. We learn to be

authentic with ourselves by being totally honest with ourselves. We learn our significance by being in a growing relationship with God (There is evidence that those who fail to discover their significance in relationship to God by age 35 or 40 will invariably become sick mentally and psychologically.) In order to love and be loved by others we need to learn to be persons of integrity (transparency). Finally, we need to learn how to relate as a community (solidarity). These areas of growth seem to occur in approximately twenty-one year cycles as we move from childhood to old age. If we don't grow in these areas in accord with our ages, we tend to become stuck and do not become the people God intended us to be. God seems to have made us this way but we need to respond to these inner promptings to grow. It is a choice and a test of our free-will.

Will I follow the inner promptings that will result in my psychological and spiritual growth? Many people have adult bodies but are still psychologically adolescents (or even children in some cases).

Addictions will halt our growth in its tracks. Do I have any addictions resulting from my fear of growing by experiencing necessary emotional pain? How can we as a Church help in our collective growth? How can we help our brothers and sisters in Christ to grow? .

Day 18-The Holy Spirit: Descent of the Spirit On the Elders: Read Numbers 11:16-30

In the reading for Day 11 we saw how Moses learned to share the burden of leadership through delegation. In today's reading, the Lord's ratification of the ministry of the elders is completed by the descent of the Spirit upon them. The proof of the ratification is that the elders are able to prophesy; not foretelling the future but speaking with enraptured enthusiasm. Even those leaders who were not at the meeting but were at the camp began to prophesy. Moses' wish was that

all of the Hebrews would receive the Lord's Spirit.

When Jesus ascended into heaven He promised that He would send the Holy Spirit on all those who believed in Him, not just the elders. The initial pouring of the Spirit on Pentecost was followed by the spread of the Spirit like wildfire throughout the community. Two-thousand years later, this same Spirit has been given to us to use to build up each other, the Church, and the world.

How has the gift of the Holy Spirit been manifested in my life? Do I stifle the Spirit through inaction on His promptings? How is the Holy Spirit revealed in our Church?

Read 1 Corinthians 12-14. What spiritual gifts are evident in my life?

How are they used for the building up of Christ's body, the Church?

Day 19- Rebellion Within the Church: Jealousy of Aaron and Miriam: Read Numbers 12:1-16

Moses was a very humble man who did not jealously guard his position of authority. As we saw in the reading for Day 18, his prayer was that all the Hebrews would receive the gifts of the Spirit and develop leadership capabilities. Not so with his sister and brother. They were jealous of the authority given to Moses (his marrying a despised foreigner' was only a pretext to give it voice). The Lord made it abundantly clear that while others may experience the Lord in visions and dreams, Moses sees God face-to-face as a friend. The Lord stopped the rebellion in its tracks and Moses had to intercede for his family.

Today there is much rebellion in Jesus' Church. There are literally thousands of denominations and it is getting to the point where it seems like every family wants to be its own church, play by their own rules and maybe even define a god in its own image. The Body of Christ seems to be losing its organs and limbs and is becoming only a huge group of single-celled organisms that overall have the shape of a body

but may not function as one. While there may be good reasons to go church shopping, today's reading gives a warning that Church unity is a priority and that anyone disrupting the Church had better have a good and God-inspired reason for doing so!

Do I work toward unity in my Church? Am I a person who is constantly church-shopping to find a church that is most nearly one created in my image? How does jealousy play out in my life? What am I jealous of? How can I counteract and repent of this vice?

Day 20- The Scourge of Fear: The Scouting of Canaan: Read Numbers 13:1-14:38

"The land we explored consumes its inhabitants! All the people we saw there were giants! We felt like grasshoppers and so we must have seen to them!" With these words nearly all of the men who scouted the land of Canaan discouraged the people (who had seen the power of the Lord at least ten times) to the point where they were making plans to appoint a leader to return them to Egypt! Because of their fear and lack of faith in the Lord, the Lord swore that none of that generation would enter the Promised Land. He turned them back from the land they were to enter toward the desert for an additional 38 years until that generation died off. This is what fear and lack of faith will do. It will delay all the good that the Lord has in store for us.

Today, our fears will do the same: prevent the good that Jesus has in store for us. Fear is an evil ally and one the Lord never uses. He encourages by faith and love. If we are afraid, Christ's love has not yet been perfected in us. We need to learn to trust the Lord and act on faith and not the fears of our own making and egos. This is true for us as both individuals and as Church.

In what ways does fear control my life? What are my fears? (List them below.) What are the fears of our Church? (Fear of financial need? Fear to evangelize? Fear to give up the comforts of a middle class life in a

secular culture? Etc.) How can I counteract these fears? How, as Church, can we grow beyond our fears?

Day 21- Disobeying the Lord's Command: Unsuccessful Invasions: Read Numbers

15:39-45

Once Moses told the people the Lord's judgments (Day 20), the people were horrified and filled with remorse. They then tried to go up and invade the inhabitants of the land even though the Lord told them not to since He would not go with them. They went anyway and experienced a terrible defeat. There are times when obeying the Lord's promptings in an untimely manner is just as bad as not obeying at all.

We will get communications from the Lord in various ways as individuals and as a Church. We must listen and obey. This is more important to the Lord than anything else. How do we become open to hearing the Holy Spirit every day, recognize the Lord's voice and discern His will?

There are many ways including prayer, meditation/reflection, contemplation/silence, Scripture/other spiritual reading, consultation with spiritual friends, and personal experience. If the decision is important, we should try to get confirmation through several of these means.

In what ways does the Lord prompt me? How long does it take for me to obey? Do I have examples from my own life where I tried to obey the Lord in an untimely manner and failed? What ministry is the Lord prompting me to do right now?

Day 22- A Descent To Hell- Rebellions of Korah, Dathan and Abiram: Read Numbers

16:1-17:15

The rebellion of Dathan and Abiram was against Moses alone as their leader. These were punished by immediately being swallowed up in an earthquake. The rebellion of Korah was of a religious nature against

the religious leadership of both Moses and Aaron. These and their band were immediately punished by a consuming fire. These punishments remind one of Satan being cast out of Heaven because of his rebellion against God. Pride and presumption have proven to be deadly!

Today, we cannot look on natural phenomena like earthquakes, tsunamis or hurricanes as judgments on the people being killed. Jesus made this clear when He was asked about those who were crushed by a falling tower. They were by no means worse sinners than others. All will experience suffering and loss as long as we don't repent completely. In this world we will always have suffering and pain. We all must be aware of pride and presumption (taking the Lord's mercy for granted).

In what ways am I presumptions of God's grace and blessings? How does pride affect my relationships with others, both within and without the Church? How am I prideful and presumptuous? How am I rebellious? How do I dishonor the Lord and church leadership?

Day 23- The Sin of Leadership: The Sin of Moses: Read Numbers 20:2-13

Like so many times in the past, the Hebrews are grumbling and wanting to return to Egypt because they don't have water at the moment.

Understand that Moses has been listening to this for many years and his people still don't trust the Lord to provide. The Lord tells him to strike the rock and water will flow. Moses, in his exasperation with the constant quarreling of the people, leads them to the rock where water had flowed in the past. Instead of honoring the Lord, Moses said, "Must we bring you water out of this rock?" The Lord is angry at him for "not trusting in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites," He will not allow Moses to enter the Promised Land even though he has been leading the people for nearly forty years! What is his sin? The sin is that of not trusting the Lord enough to honor Him as holy. Instead, Moses claimed the miracle for himself. He felt this

would strengthen his leadership in the eyes of the people. Evidently, this is considered a major sin of leadership.

Today, that tendency may still be in many Churches; the tendency of a leader to deny the power and love of God and unconsciously (or not) projecting this onto the people. By not being an example of the Lord's holiness, the people will not learn to be holy. By not having faith, the people may lose faith. In all fairness though, as with Moses, a congregation can greatly frustrate a leader and push him beyond his emotional endurance since he is only human. We should encourage, support, pray for and love our leaders to empower them to lead us.

Do I exasperate our Church leaders? Do we as a Church exasperate them? How can we support our leaders? What can I personally do to help and support our priests?

Day 24- A Prefiguration of the Cross: The Bronze Serpent: Read Numbers 21:4-9

Again, the Hebrews are complaining, not from a lack of food but because they are disgusted and bored with the manna they are being fed! This time, venomous serpents are sent among them, to bite, kill many of them and bring the rest back to their senses. The people confess their sin (it seems that many never really repent since they do not change) and ask to be healed. They are told to make and raise up a metal casting of the serpent and that any who look upon the image will be healed. (It is interesting to note that while the Lord will not tolerate an image of Himself, it is acceptable to make an image representing and reminding them of their sin. It is also interesting to note that five centuries later, King Hezekiah had the casting destroyed in an effort to wipe out idolatry since many were worshiping the image. It was being worshiped as the god Nehushtan.)

In New Testament times (and our own), the meaning of the bronze serpent has become a prefiguration of the Cross of Christ: "And as Moses lifted

up the serpent in the desert, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that those who believe in Him may not perish, but may have life everlasting."

Do I recognize that the risen Jesus can heal my ills and give me life to the full? Can there even be a Church in which the Cross of Christ is not lifted up? Meditate on the meaning of the Cross and write down your thoughts below.

Day 25- Extraordinary Spiritual Phenomena: Baalam' Talking Donkey: Read Numbers 22:22-40:24:15-19

Balak, the King of Moab, has summoned Baalam, a well known prophet in the region, to magically curse the Hebrew people. He will pay Baalam a huge reward for doing so. The Lord wants Baalam to go but to only say a blessing on the Hebrews. God realizes that Baalam is being tempted by greed to curse the people instead and makes it very clear to Baalam, through means of a talking donkey, that he must not do so. Baalam comes to his senses and blesses the people. Balak is furious with him and storms off giving him no payment at all.

Many claim to hear Gods voice or see visions but it is important to test the spirit since, as Jesus noted, you will know them by their fruit. An evil spirit can easily appear as an angel of light or our own spirit can seduce us. If it is truly a vision or voice from God, the person will not contradict Scripture and basic Christian theology. If nothing but good results, if it makes the person more humble, more loving toward God, neighbor and self, if it helps the person to grow in faith, hope, and trust in God, the probability is that the experience is authentically from God. (If one wants to learn more about the testing of spirits, he/she should read from the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola.)

While God mostly communicates with us through ordinary means, have you

ever had extraordinary experiences of God? Have you tested them to see if they were genuinely from God? (This is one area where a spiritual director will be critical.) Has the Church experienced any extraordinary phenomena? (For example, during a prayer and praise service at Christ Church in Schenectady, young and old from both the front and back of the Church saw angels on either side of the altar singing praises with the congregation.)

Day 26- A Great Commissioning: Joshua to Succeed Moses: Read Numbers 27:12-23

Joshua, a man with strong leadership qualities (courage, prudence, strength of will) is to receive his commission to succeed Moses as leader of the Hebrews. (Of the scouts sent out, only Joshua and Caleb trusted in the power of the Lord (see Numbers 14:5-9)). Moses lays hands on him in the presence of Eleazar the priest and the whole community and commissioned him as the Lord commanded. He does not have the same intimacy with God as did Moses who spoke to God face-to-face. He will generally receive answers from God through the Urim and Thummim, objects that will provide a "Yes" or "No" answer to specific questions.

While special individuals are commissioned to be priests or perform other functions as the Holy Spirit dictates, we are all called, as individuals and as Church, to obey the Great Commission (not the Great Suggestion) of Jesus: Go forth and make disciples of all nations.

Do I take our purpose of "disciples making disciples" seriously? How do I show others what it is to be a Christian? How does the Church evangelize? Am I willing to be open to new areas and opportunity for ministry? Am I willing to go beyond my comfort zone?

Day 27- Love of God: The Great Commandment: Read Deuteronomy 1:1-5, 6:4-9

It is now the 40th year since leaving Egypt. The community is ready to enter the Promised Land. Moses knows he will soon die and tells his

people about all that has happened since their time of slavery. He gives them the main commandment that summarizes all the Lord is trying to teach them: by loving God you will find completion, meaning and joy in your lives.

Today, we have even greater reason to love God. He willingly offered Himself, His only Son, to win us freedom since love can do no more than that. We are asked as individuals and Church to meditate on this great truth and act accordingly.

How often during the day do you think about God? What can you do to focus your attention more on God during the day? When you awaken during the night, do you pray? How much time do you give each day to thanking and praising God for all the blessings you have received? How much time do you give to formal prayer and Bible study? Do you tithe your time with God, giving Him at least 10% of your prime time? How about your money? Do you really trust God? How can you make Him more real in your life? How often do you pray with others? Are you faithful in coming together for worship? When did you experience a special closeness to God?

Day 28- Love of Neighbor As Yourself: The Second Great Commandment: Read Leviticus 19:17-18

The second great commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself. In spite of what seems obvious, how do people love themselves enough given the amount of drug/alcohol abuse, obesity, and self-destructive/uncivil behavior that abounds in our country and the world? One cannot have a healthy love for others if one doesn't have a healthy love for themselves. One excellent definition of love is to give yourself or another person whatever is needed for your/their spiritual growth.

Another is praying for another the blessings (or even greater) blessings that you desire for yourself.

Have you a good self image? How disciplined are you? How much time do you give to your intellectual development? How well do you know yourself? What do you like or dislike about your self? Do you have respect for your body and take good care of it? (Remember, it is where the Holy Spirit dwells!) What are your eating and drinking habits? Do you give your body enough exercise and recreation? How much sleep do you get (some actually get way too much)? Do you smoke? How do you handle stress?

What are you doing to love each of your family members? What are you doing to show your love to those with whom you work or recreate? Is there anyone you have treated unfairly, unjustly, uncharitably? Do you need to forgive anyone who has hurt you? How much of your time, talent and treasure do you give to others? How well do you handle conflict? How often do you pray for others, especially your enemies?

Day 29: Caretakers of the Land: Fidelity in Prosperity: Read Deuteronomy 6:10-25

The Lord is leading the people into a fine country flowing with milk and honey. This is a way of saying that the land is bursting with health, vitality and abundance. As long as they obey the Lord the Hebrews will be allowed to remain in that land. If not, the land will lose its glory and abundance and they will be exiled from it.

Today we see many parts of this beautiful world God gave us to care for being destroyed and losing its fruitfulness. More and more land is being turned into desert and its diversity being destroyed. Besides being kicked out of Eden, we are choosing to defile and destroy our own existing home! How well would we treat our heavenly home if we can't be trusted with what we have now? As we grow in intimacy with our Lord, we will come to cherish the earth because it is His and he shares it with us.

How does your indulgence in certain habits contribute to the decimation

of the Earth's resources? How much recycling do you do? What are you doing to arouse public interest in the environment? How can you be more attuned to the beauty, grandeur and abundance of creation? How can you spend more time with nature? What can we, as a Church, do to take our caretaker role seriously?

Day 30- God's Care: The Danger of Prosperity- Read Deuteronomy 8:1-20

The Lord took care of the Hebrews for 40 years in the wilderness. He fed them and gave them bodily health and strength for the journey. The Lord disciplined the people to encourage their growth and ultimate wellbeing as parents correct their children. The discipline may not be fun at the time but it is necessary for the future success and happiness of the child. The Lord provided all of the good things of life; everything that they had and were! They are not to forget where their wellbeing comes from lest it be taken away as a corrective measure.

Today, it is still difficult to remember to keep the proper mindset; especially in a secular and materialistic culture like our own. We must always remember that we did not create ourselves or give ourselves our spiritual gifts and talents though we must use discipline and practice to develop them. They are from God who expects us to use them, as well as our material resources, for His glory and the benefit of those around us. In this we will find our joy in life and our place in Creation. We, as Church, must also remember that it is the Lord who provides success and growth within the Body of Christ. If we are not mindful that it is the Lord's work, that we are only His instruments, He will take it away from us and give it to others who will reap the harvest at the proper time.

What are the gifts that the Lord has given me? Which have I developed? Which ones do I have yet to develop? Do I use my gifts to help build up

other's gifts? Do I recognize that God is caring for me even when I go through trials? How are we, as a Church, growing in the Lord? How is He disciplining us, pruning us so that we may reap a great harvest for His glory? What is my role in this plan? Am I ready to fulfill my responsibilities?

Day 31- What the Lord Desires: The Circumcised Heart- Read Deuteronomy 10:12-22;

James 1:25-27

The Lord makes it clear that he wants the Hebrews to circumcise their hearts'; to remove their hardness by breaking them so that they will be open and responsive to God's grace and guidance. He wants them to fear the Lord'. The holiness of God can inspire terror as well as obedience but there is also an awe of God which is compatible with delight in Him and love. How are they to show that they fear the Lord and that their hearts are circumcised? They are to love, serve and treat with compassion the aliens, widows and orphans in their land.

It is the same today. We are to treat the disadvantaged with love and compassion. In addition to orphans, widows and aliens, we are to treat society's lepers with love and compassion; those with AIDS, homosexuals, the pedophile, the Muslim, the woman receiving an abortion, the mentally ill, the homeless, those in prison and all others that society chooses to shun. This will prove that we fear the Lord and are His children.

We must, as a Church, decide if it is more important to upkeep a building or give money to organizations that care for the marginalized. These were precisely those that Jesus called blessed in the Beatitudes because they had no one but God to help them.

James writes of the importance of caring for widows and orphans. In fact, the diaconate was formed for that purpose. This is not only a diaconal ministry, but for the individual believer. How do I care for widows and orphans? Do I pray for them daily? What can I do to help my church honor widows and orphans?

Who are the lepers in my life? How do I still suffer from a hardened heart? How as an individual and as a Church can we support and aid the marginalized in our society and world? How do I think my attitude toward life would be different if I were one of the marginalized?

Day 32- Societal Responsibility to the Needy: The Sabbatical and Jubilee Years-
Read Deuteronomy 15:1-11 and Leviticus 25:8-22

Continuing from Day 31, how is society to take care of the poor and dispossessed? Part of the answer in ancient Israel was in laws relating to the Sabbatical and Jubilee Years. These are the seventh and fiftieth years when debts are cancelled, land lies fallow, slaves are set free and land is returned to its original owners. (In addition, usury or the charging of interest on loans to other Israelites was always forbidden by the Mosaic law.) These laws are an ideal code and it is not certain that some of the most idealistic ideas were ever fully put into practice. They stand together, however, as a vision of Israel living completely under the dominion of God and in obedience to the divine will--they are holy as God is holy and all of Israel's actions are to respect the integrity and purpose of God's creation.

Today, we have social programs, entitlements and safety nets in addition to charitable organizations that provide for the needy with the help of contributions from individuals. Religious organizations also provide services to meet the needs of others as acts of love and justice. Our donations to the Church satisfy a small part of our obligations to others. In addition to tithing, we should aid organizations that benefit the disadvantaged since these were precisely those with whom the Lord Jesus spent time with and blessed with the Beatitudes.

How do I aid the needy? Am I working toward giving to charitable causes in addition to tithing to the Church? What societal laws are needed to

care for the disadvantaged? How can I help promote these laws?

Day 33- Prayer and Praise: The Battle Against Amalek: Read Exodus 17:8-13

The Hebrews engaged in a battle with the Amalekites, a people who harassed them during their desert journey. As long as Moses kept his arms raised in prayer and praise, the Hebrews were winning the battle. When he stopped praying and praising, the Hebrews began to lose the battle. Moses grew tired so he sat on a rock on a mountain overseeing the battle and had two of his servants support his arms so that they would stay raised all day until the Amalekites were defeated.

Today, prayer and praise can still work miracles at the Lord's hands.

Today, however, we are not trying to wipe out a people who harassed us.

We are trying to defeat an even worse enemy; our own sinful natures (Pogo was right: We have met the enemy and he is us!) As a Church, the power of prayer and praise can do much more than we can do as individuals. When the power of our joint prayers is combined with praise, we may be able to change the world for Christ' sake!

How often do I praise God with outstretched arms? What do I need to praise Him for? Do I attend my Church' prayer and praise services often enough? Write below a short hymn of praise to Jesus for all He has done for you.

Day 34- Prayer and Thanksgiving: First Fruits and Tithes: Read Deuteronomy 26:1-15

When the Hebrews entered the Promised Land they were to tithe from the first fruits of the soil and herds as a thanksgiving to the Lord for all He has done for them. They were to offer these to God for use by the priests and the needy of the land including, among others, aliens, orphans and widows. Thanksgiving and action were to be an integral part of the prayer life of the people. It is true to this day as modern Jews combine the word of God (Torah) with righteous actions (Mitzvos): "For

a mitzvah is a candle and the Torah is light."

Today, we don't generally have crops and cattle to offer as our first fruit tithes. We are to give money and services for the use of the Church and to aid those in need. Our tithing is an act of faith. If we don't tithe, we can't expect God to bless us as He would like since faith is to be such an important part of our lives. In many ways a Church that has a large endowment is at a real and severe spiritual disadvantage since parishioners may be tempted not to tithe and thus not exercise their faith. An endowment can easily be used as one of the greatest devices of the devil to defeat the work of the Church of Christ!

Do I see the possessions I have as mine or as His? Do I tithe? If not, am I moving in the direction of tithing, giving 10% of my income? If not, why is my faith so weak? Do I really expect the Lord to act on my behalf and behalf of the Church if I don't express my faith in a way that He wants? What must we do as individuals and Church to increase our faith and express it in very tangible ways?

Day 35-The Mystery of Change: Mercy for Repentance-Read Deuteronomy 30:1-14

God promised Moses that the people could always return to His good graces by repentance. This is more than being sorry. (It appears that many of those committing the improprieties on Wall Street and Washington are only sorry for being caught!) Repentance means changing; something that most people are incapable of doing on their own. This is where the beauty and wisdom of the 12-Step programs (developed by Episcopalians, imagine that!) come to the rescue. The heart of the program, steps four through nine, is the mysterious process of change that results in freedom for those that were the most hopeless.

Step 4- Made a searching moral inventory of ourselves (examination of conscience)

Step 5- Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs (confession)

Step 6- We were entirely ready to have God remove all of these defects of character (circumcision of the heart)

Step 7- Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings (prayer)

Step 8- Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all (preparing to make amends)

Step 9- Made direct amends to such people whenever possible except when to do so would injure them or others (making amends)

I recognize from experience that steps 6 and 7 are the most mysterious.

It may take a lot of work to want to change (As St. Augustine said:

"Lord, make me chaste; but not yet!) Asking God through prayer to remove my shortcomings when I've finally accepted the fact that I want to change leaves God free to remove them in His own time and way. In my impatience and frustration I've often got angry at God for not keeping His promise to help me change. Then, when I least expected, I'll discover that I had changed and that others noticed it first! While I must do the foot work of change, ultimately it is all grace (amazing!)

Look at your examination of conscience conducted during the course of the last forty days (see especially days 1, 27, 28 and 29) and work through the above steps.

Day 36- The Power of Free Will: The Choice of Life or Death: Read Deuteronomy 30:15-20

Moses lays down the stark choice: life or death, fire or water, loyalty or disloyalty, freedom or slavery yet again, submitting their wills to the Lord or their own egos and other false gods. His people can choose either and will reap the consequences of their choice. How will they choose? The answer is contained in the next six books of the Bible: the book of Judges, the book of Joshua, the two books of Samuel and the two

books of Kings. These give the history of the Hebrew people over the next five centuries. Based on this testimony, there were very few periods (and very few Kings) where the people and rulers choose life. The final result of the Deuteronomic History is that the northern kingdom of Israel gets destroyed by the Assyrians in the 8th century BC and never again exists as a people. The kingdom of Judah is destroyed by the Babylonians in the 6th century BC and are exiled to Babylon to be purified. Only those who go through this purifying experience of exile will continue to be the people of God.

The experience of 2,000 years of Christianity is also mixed. There were many periods where it appears that the Church leaders went astray by following power, pleasure and possessions instead of following the still, small voice and humbly obeying it. Earthly power became more important than spiritual power. Today, the choice is still ours to make. Will the Church follow a living God that challenges us to growth and holiness or a dead God that pacifies us and allows us to be comfortable in our middle class lifestyle and unchanging? The choice is yours, and ours!

Read Psalm 1. Which path do I normally take? How do I choose life? How do I choose death? In what areas does our Church need to grow and choose life?

Day 37- Remembering From the Heart: The Song of Moses: Read Deuteronomy 31:30-32:44

Moses, in his role as a great prophet and teacher, sings this song, a poetic sermon, to the Hebrews as they are about to enter the Promised Land. It will be remembered and sung at the campfires to teach of God's love and benefits to His people and the ingratitude of His people by turning to idolatry with the gods of the surrounding pagan nations. God will use the pagan nations themselves to punish His people. The foolish

pride of the pagan nations (who think that they have conquered Israel by their own power) will then be punished and the Lord's honor will be vindicated. This song talks of the future and what will happen when Israel is conquered by Assyria and Babylon but will return to their homeland after they have been purified by exile and suffering.

Is it possible that the United States, because of its great power, pride and secularism, is being taught lessons by both our enemies and the collapsing world economy? Perhaps God will use our idols of power, pleasure and possessions to teach us lessons we could not learn otherwise.

Thoughtfully reflect on how the Lord could teach us lessons through nature and events and write below a brief song or psalm expressing these thoughts.

Day 38- The Quest for Relics: The Death and Burial of Moses: Read Deuteronomy 32:48-52 and 34:1-12

God allowed Moses to feast his eyes on the Promised Land from Mount Nebo. After that, he died at the age of 120 and was buried in the land of Moab. The people mourned him for thirty days after which Joshua led the people into Canaan. By the time the book of Deuteronomy was written, no one knew where the grave was located.

Perhaps it is good that the grave of Moses remains unknown. If it was definitely known where his bones were laid, I am sure that "relics" of his would have circulated across the country and perhaps even worshiped or assumed to have magical powers as happened with the bronze serpent in Old Testament times and as the bones of Christian saints have been honored during the Middle Ages. Today, the Shroud of Turin, the supposed burial cloth of Jesus, is probably the most famous relic of the Christian Church. I suspect that no matter how good the science gets, God will never allow hard, irrefutable evidence of His existence

and works to be discovered. Where would the need for faith be if science were allowed to prove such things?

How much and what kinds of evidence do I require to augment my faith?

Do I have any superstitious beliefs? Do I hold any items (crucifix's, scapulas, bones of saints for example) to be nearly magical in their power to protect me? Do I believe in horoscopes and other astrological practices?

Day 39- Legacy of Moses 1: Old Testament Legacy- Read Psalm 78, Sirach 45:1-5, Wisdom 10:15-11:3

The memory of Moses, friend of God and master law giver, lived on after his death in the 12th century BC. The story of Moses and the Exodus was transmitted by mouth from father to son at the campfires of Israel and started being put into writing around the time of Solomon and later (9th century BC). The Five Books of Moses (the Pentateuch, the Torah) were put into final written form while the Jews were exiled in Babylon in the 5th century BC. Readings from Sirach and Wisdom (both in the Apocrypha of protestant Bibles) show that Moses and the Exodus memory were still at the heart of Jewish faith in the 1st and 2nd centuries BC. Today, 33 centuries after his time, Moses and the Exodus are read during Passover, as sacred to Jews as Easter is to Christians.

Contemplate what you have learned about Moses and the Exodus. Read Deuteronomy 16:1-8. Can you understand why he is the pinnacle of the Jewish faith? Can you understand why the Law is so important to the Jewish faith?

Day 40- Legacy of Moses 2:New Testament Legacy- Read Matthew 17:1-8, John 3:13-15, Acts 7:20-44, Hebrews 11:23-29, Revelations 15:1-4

The legacy of Moses continues in the New Testament. Moses, representing the Law appears with Elijah, representing the Prophets, at the Transfiguration of Jesus on the holy mountain (symbolic of Mt. Sinai)

and they talk about Jesus' mission in Jerusalem. The bronze serpent of Moses is used as a prefigurement of the Cross of Christ. He is preached as one of the great heroes of the faith and, in the last book of the Bible, Revelations, his hymn (from Exodus 15) is sung by the angels. On a more subtle level, the early life of Jesus in the Gospels of Mathew and Luke are patterned on the life of Moses and the Exodus journey. To this day he is one of the great fathers of the faith in the Christian Church.

How has your life been like the Exodus journey? How has the life of the Church been like the Exodus journey? What does our entry into the Promised Land mean? Have our own weaknesses and laziness kept us in the wilderness? What can I, as an individual, and the Church do to hasten the entry into the Promised Land or the Kingdom of God?

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We have now reached the end of our Lenten journey. The Hebrews are entering the Promised Land, a pinnacle of the Jewish faith while we are celebrating Easter, the pinnacle of the Christian faith. The Hebrew journey is also our journey as the Old Testament prefigures the Christian faith contained in the New Testament. Jesus is the new Moses, leading us to freedom. Jesus' story and the story of the Christian Church is, at many points, paralleled in the Exodus story. The story continues to this day. May the next chapters in your life and in the life of the Church be one of glorious growth as the Lord leads us to the next stop on our journey of faith. Amen.

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