

# Connection to the Cross

## A Lenten Journey

A Small Group series based on the Sunday Readings for Year B

**The Evangelical Catholic**

**Connections Series**

**Connection to the Cross: A Lenten Journey**

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# TIME TO BEGIN

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## Introduction

*"Now is the acceptable time; behold,  
now is the day of salvation."*

*2 Corinthians 6:2*

How much of life we put off!

“I’ll organize that closet some day...”

“Tomorrow I’ll start a diet...”

“I’ll quit smoking once I’m past this stressful time.”

“I’ll repair that \_\_\_\_\_ at home when work isn’t so busy ...”

How many people do you know who never quit smoking, never lose weight, never fix things long broken and unattended?

Isn’t this true of everyone? We all put off what we know would be better to do.

And don’t we do the same thing with God?

I’ll pray regularly once the kids are in school, once they’re at college, once they’re grown up...

I’ll make a confession another time...

When I’m not so tired from work, I’ll make time to read the scriptures...

As important as the physical parts of life are - health, order, home – if what we say we believe about God is true, how much more important are our supernatural lives! Our very hearts and souls are too often what is broken and unattended, in need of repair only God can provide. Yet we do not go to the only one who can help us.

If God is love, how can we hope that what comes from love will be part of our lives if we aren’t growing in our relationship to Him? With-

## *Introduction*

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out God/love, how can we hope to be kind, generous and forgiving of ourselves and others? How can God help us to grow beyond putting on airs, being rude, self-seeking or prone to anger? How can we ever bear with one another, overcome pride, become patient? In the great hymn to love St. Paul wrote in his first letter to the Corinthians, he even attributes hope to love, and how can we live without hope? (1 Cor 13:1-13)

If God really so loved the world that He sent His only son, Jesus, to save us, then don't we want to truly appreciate what that means, what that cost, understand not just in our heads, but in our hearts?

For it is the movement of our hearts God seeks at Lent: "Rend your hearts, not your garments and return to the LORD" exhorts the prophet Joel.

"Now is the acceptable time. Now is the moment of salvation," says St. Paul.

The church uses these readings every Ash Wednesday to remind us, because we need to be reminded to tend what is too often neglected. We are human beings. The demands of the physical world will always seem more pressing than those of the supernatural. We must have this season to prompt us to put God, prayer, scripture and the sacraments at the top of our "To Do" lists. We need encouragement to truly "rend our hearts," not just give up chocolate or television.

*Connection to the Cross* seeks to help us do this. Through reflecting on the Sunday readings, praying together, and encouraging one another to daily prayer, we hope to love Jesus more dearly and follow Him more nearly, follow him even to the cross.

As Christians we believe we come to God through Christ. The light came into the world: without Him, we are in darkness. It is through Him that we see things as they really are instead of being duped by the lies of the Evil One, whom Jesus called "the Father of lies." (John

8:44) Reflecting together in the light of the words and actions of Jesus, and those of his earliest followers, we can experience the truth he proclaimed: God's kingdom is indeed "at hand." (Mark 1:15) It is so close we can literally taste it in Eucharist because of what Christ did for us.

Lent has the power to bring forth a great harvest in our lives and our churches. Seeds are planted in our hearts through prayer, especially praying over the scriptures that help us know Christ, and God in Him. Connection to the Cross will plant these seeds. Groups should meet before the first Sunday of Lent, and weekly after that, so you can read and pray over the Sunday readings before you hear them at Mass. Our intention is that groups do not meet during Holy Week. They might consider taking part in the Triduum as a group. The last study, Week 7, is meant to be read in a final meeting after Easter Sunday.

Attend meetings, and the seeds will be scattered in your life. It's up to each one of us to water them by following the recommendations for the coming week. Fasting and almsgiving, the other two Lenten observations, will fertilize these seeds as nothing else can. When Holy week comes, allowing the field to be drenched in the blood of the Lamb and warmed by the resurrection of the Son on Easter will bring forth fruit in our lives -- twenty, thirty, even a hundred fold.

Now is the acceptable time. Now is the moment of salvation. Don't miss it!



# A TIME FOR FAITH

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1st Sunday of Lent

*"The Spirit immediately drove  
him out into the wilderness."*

*Mark 1:12*

## Opening Prayer



**Slowly read the following prayer aloud together.**

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit:

O Lord and Master of our lives,  
keep from us the spirit of indifference  
and discouragement,  
lust of power  
and idle chatter.

Instead, grant to us, your servants,  
the spirit of wholeness of being,  
humble-mindedness, patience, and love.

O Lord and King, grant us the grace  
to be aware of our sins  
and not to judge our brothers and sisters;  
for you are blessed now and ever and forever. Amen.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Based on the ancient Lenten Prayer of St. Ephrem the Syrian, an especially important prayer during Lent for Christians in the East.

## Introduction



**Have someone read the following aloud.**

This week, at the very beginning of Lent, the readings show us important characteristics about God. God will challenge us in new ways this Lent. To grow through these challenges, it is crucial that our picture of God be rooted in truth rather than misconceptions. The Church gives us these readings at the beginning of the journey so that we will know the goodness of God and deepen our trust in our Father.

Have you had particularly positive or negative experiences with coaches or teachers? How did the attributes of the teacher or coach affect your ability to embrace their challenges?

## Scripture and Tradition



Reading: Genesis 9:8-15

**Have someone read the following passage aloud.**

<sup>8</sup>Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, <sup>9</sup>“Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your descendants after you, <sup>10</sup>and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. <sup>11</sup>I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.” <sup>12</sup>And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: <sup>13</sup>I set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of

the covenant between me and the earth. <sup>14</sup>When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, <sup>15</sup>I will remember my covenant which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh.

1. What is the covenant that God makes with Noah and his descendants?
2. How do you think Noah and his family felt about this covenant?
3. Noah and his family didn't have the written Scriptures or the Catechism to teach them about God, they learned who God was by the things he said and did.
  - What do you think they thought God was like when he told them to build the ark? What attributes might they have used to describe God, given this command?
  - How do you think they would have described God when he flooded the world?
  - When he gave them this new covenant, how might it have changed their view of this God that they were coming to know?
4. What does it say about this God that He gave them a sign in the sky of this covenant?

Reading: 1 Peter 3:18-22

**Have someone read the following aloud.**

<sup>18</sup>For Christ also died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit; <sup>19</sup>in which he went and preached to the spirits in prison, <sup>20</sup>who formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a

## *1st Sunday of Lent*

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few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. <sup>21</sup>Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, <sup>22</sup>who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers subject to him.

5. What does this passage tell us about the attributes of God?
6. Christ's mission on earth was to reveal God to us. What can we see about God through the qualities of Christ highlighted in this passage?
7. What does the end of verse 18 through verse 20 say that Christ did? What do you think this is talking about? Where is this prison? What can we see about God from these actions?

## Reading: Mark 1:12-15

**Have someone read the following aloud.**

<sup>12</sup>The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. <sup>13</sup>And he was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to him. <sup>14</sup>Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, <sup>15</sup>and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel."

8. Why does the text say Jesus went to the wilderness?
9. Why do you think it was God's will that he went into the wilderness?
10. The gospel writer mentions several aspects about Jesus' experience in the desert. We might already know that there is a longer, very rich story behind Mark's brief mention of Satanic temptations. But why the wild beasts? Why the angels?
11. What does Jesus do after his time in the wilderness is over?

12. What do you think he meant by his words in v.15? How can we understand this teaching today?

13. Lent is 40 days (excluding Sundays). It is a time designed by God and the church for us to go into the wilderness ourselves. What will it mean for you to go into the wilderness this holy season?

14. What attributes of God that we discussed earlier are the most encouraging as you set out for the wilderness this Lent?

15. How do you think Satan will tempt you? What are the wild beasts for you? Have you ever felt angels attending you through people, prayer, etc.?

## Connection to the Cross This Week



- Spend time praying with the daily readings this week. During Lent, they are chosen very intentionally in order to lead you deeper into conversion. They are listed below and then at the bottom of every chapter of this study. Appendix A describes *Lectio Divina*, a method from the ancient church on how to read and meditate on scripture prayerfully. If you are seeking to grow in prayer this Lent, read this to enrich your experience.
- You might want to write St. Ephrem's prayer on a note card and tape it to your bathroom mirror or your car's dashboard. This will help you pray it everyday this week to remind you of your spiritual goals this Lent.
- Take 20 minutes of quiet time and meditate on what means Satan might use to tempt you away from your Lenten practices. He's not that original. Temptations usually come in the form of his same old lies and tricks. He only finds new ones when

## 1st Sunday of Lent

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he sees you have become impervious to the old. What are your “wild beasts?” Make concrete plans for how you might resist your habitual temptations.

- Go to a daily Mass this week at a local parish if you don't normally go to daily Mass. Make it something of a journey away from the busyness of your day and into the wilderness in order to find God.

### **This Week's Readings**

Monday - Lev 19:1-2, 11-18; Ps 20:8, 9, 10, 15; Matt 25:31-46

Tuesday - Isa 55:10-11; Ps 34:4-5, 6-7, 16-17, 18-19; Matt 6:7-15

Wednesday - Jonah 3:1-10; Ps 51:3-4, 12-13, 18-19; Luke 11:29-32

Thursday - Esth C:12, 14-16, 23-25; Ps 138:1-2-3, 7c-8; Matt 7:7-12

Friday - Ezek 18:21-28; Ps 130:1-2, 3-4, 5-8; Matt 5:20-26

Saturday - Deut 26:16-19; Ps 119:1-2, 4-5, 7-8; Matt 5:43-48

Spend a little time praying for each other at the beginning of this Lent.

### **Closing Prayer**



The facilitator could ask for any prayer petitions that people have. The group could then spend time sharing their personal needs with each other and perhaps everyone could offer a simple prayer for the person on their right. When the group finishes praying for one another, pray the Closing Prayer aloud together.

As always with prayer, just be natural, and don't worry about what you will say. Jesus told us the Holy Spirit would give us the words we need. Eloquence is far less important than a prayerful spirit.

*Here is an example for how this might sound:*

[Jim]: I would like prayer for my friend...

[Sue - Person to Jim's right]: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: Lord, I pray that you would help Jim's friend with...Amen.

[Sue]: I would like prayer for my work...

[Laura – Person to Sue's right]: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: Jesus, please help Sue at work...Amen.

**[After last person prays, all pray the following together.]**

O Christ Jesus,  
when all is darkness  
and we feel our weakness and helplessness,  
give us the sense of Your presence,  
your love, and your strength.  
Help us to have perfect trust  
in your protecting love  
and strengthening power,  
so that nothing may frighten or worry us,  
for, living close to you,  
we shall see your hand,  
your purpose, your will through all things.

—**St. Ignatius of Loyola, (1491-1556)**