

# A Camino through Lent



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*Cover image: Shutterstock*

## A place to pray

We don't all have room for a special place to pray, but in just a small corner of your home, you could create a little Lent shrine, and add something to it as you pray each day of Holy Week. If you can find somewhere to fit this in, it will help you to create a tranquil, prayerful space in your busy home, where you can be at peace and reflect for a while.

Below are some ideas for creating a calm space, and some symbols you can bring to it during Holy Week that relate to the Gospel. Just choose one or two each day and add to your "shrine". You may find other symbols that you want to use.

You could use a small table, or part of the floor somewhere that is convenient in your home.

Place a piece of purple cloth there, with a bible, a small container of ash or finely ground soil, and a candle, and something to light it with for your times of prayer.

Consider keeping a journal this Lent, as you pray and reflect during our Camino: place a notebook and pen in your Lent shrine.



## In Holy Week



- **PALM SUNDAY:** place a scarf or a shawl (remember they laid the cloaks on the floor); a small branch from a tree or some pussy willow.
- **MONDAY:** add a teardrop—cut a shape from paper or place a little water in a small glass.
- **TUESDAY:** draw round your hand or cut out a hand from a magazine picture.
- **WEDNESDAY:** add a few silver coins – a reminder of the 30 pieces of silver,
- **MAUNDY THURSDAY:** put a small towel or flannel in your shrine, and in the evening, add a wine glass and a little piece of bread.
- **GOOD FRIDAY:** place a padlock or a bit of chain in your space; at midday, set your crucifix there.

- **HOLY SATURDAY:** add a clock as a symbol of waiting; or an unlit candle (one that has been lit before), or an empty container—perhaps a mug or glass laid on its side.
- **EASTER SUNDAY** Change the colour of your cloth to yellow or white, and use symbols of new life: a spring flower or a whole bunch; a branch with new buds; an egg; a pebble – representing the rolled away stone; a small white hanky or napkin for the discarded cloths.

Maybe you could decorate an Easter branch with painted eggs – especially if you have children who would like to do this.

*(Photos and text: Sr Susan Richert PVBM)*



# ASH WEDNESDAY

## **Ash Wednesday: 17<sup>th</sup> February 2021**

Happy Lent! It might seem a strange greeting, but it is part of the Lent tradition: here in the Northern hemisphere, Lent takes place in spring, the season we associate with new life—and cleaning! Lent is that opportunity to 'spring clean' our own personal lives, and the life of the community: we move forward in growth, aware of the new life of Easter and the impact that it can have on our lives. Our acts of 'giving up' or 'doing extra' during Lent help us to focus on the important things of life so that we heed the call of God in the prophecy of Joel:

**Come back to me with all your heart, fasting, weeping, mourning, let your hearts be broken, not your garments torn; turn to the Lord your God again.** (Joel 2: 12-13)

Our mission during Lent is to be reconciled with God and with our neighbours—especially those we do not like or find it difficult to get on with. Paul begs us today **'not to neglect the grace of God that you have received...this is the day of salvation.'** (2. Cor 5: 20 & 6:2).

This is a time of real conversion, so needed in this difficult year when relationships may be strained, fractured and, even, destroyed by the problems associated with lockdown and the pandemic. We are invited to come forward for a new rite of the blessing of the ashes as they are sprinkled over our heads. The black ash cross that I wore as a badge of honour in previous years becomes another victim of this deadly pandemic. That smudged black cross was a talking point—it was a sign of our identity as the season of Lent begins.

However, in the gospel today, Jesus is very clear about the nature of this Lenten fast, as he tells his followers:

**Be careful not to parade your good deeds before others to attract their notice.**  
(Matt 6: 1)

Through this passage in Mark, Jesus is able to sum up the attitude that must be ours during these six long weeks: we are invited to pray, fast and give support to those in need. We are not called to show off and attract others to our lifestyle—we are Christians not narcissists. When we give alms, we must not do so in a way that will attract attention—in these difficult times, there are so many small and local charities that you can help. You may be called to offer support to family members or to your friends; you can make a difference, but only if you can spare yourself:

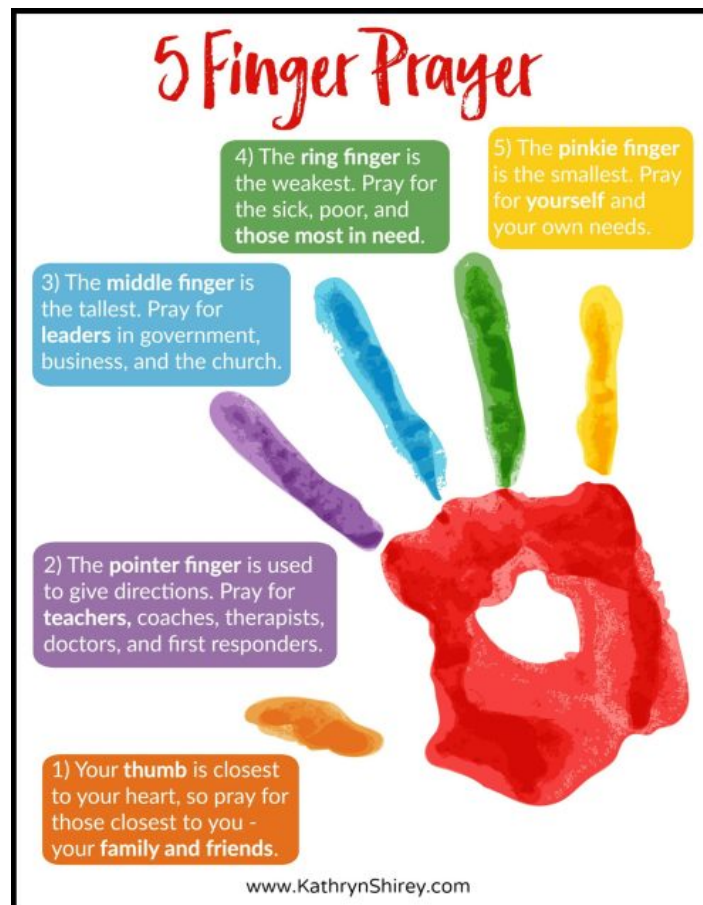
**Your father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you.** (Matt 6: 4)

In our prayer, we are invited into a relationship with God, rather than needing to use long and complicated words. We do not need to sit in a special place in Church to be noticed; we do not need to spend hours at bible study or prayer groups to be noticed. Jesus is quite direct:

**When you pray go to your private room and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in that secret place.** (Matt 6: 6)

In lockdown, when your family might be crammed into your home, you might dream of having a secret place! However, remember that secret place can be your attitude of mind; can you grab just five minutes to pray on your own?

I have some dear friends who end their day, as the children are getting ready to sleep, with a simple prayer advocated by Pope Francis, and perhaps this can become a practice in your household this Lent.



You can use each finger of your hand to help you pray in a meaningful way; in your own special time, with your family, you invite God into your life. In the gospel of Matthew, it is at this point that Jesus gives us the great prayer, **'Our Father'** (Matt 6: 7-15). While urging you to, at least try the 'five-fingered prayer', can I urge you to end whatever prayer time you might find in Lent with the 'Our Father'. (For a good guide to the 'five-fingered prayer' see: <https://www.prayerandpossibilities.com/5-finger-prayer/>)

Finally, we come to fasting, which we associate Lent strongly with; we are encouraged to give up things that we like such as chocolates, alcohol or red meat. Jesus urges us **'not to put on a gloomy look as the hypocrites do' and 'pull long faces to let others know you are fasting'** (Matt 6:16). Christianity is not an endurance test-we are not meant to meet the Lord and others through gritted teeth. Fasting and the notion of 'giving up' remains central to the Christian way and this global pandemic has forced us to give up so much: we could not meet friends; we could not share a full family Christmas; we have been unable to be with loved ones in hospital. Covid-19 has asked us to make so many sacrifices in an attempt to stop the spread; we have been invited to put on facemasks and keep our distance even in our churches and places of worship. In this past year, we have had to fast from so much that we saw as normal and intrinsic to our happiness and well-being. Thus I strongly urge you to consider seriously what you are going to fast from. Instead of giving up cream cakes, why not consider fasting from telling lies or spreading gossip? Why not spend less time on social media, perhaps obsessing on the latest conspiracy theory about vaccinations or the world's political order? In fasting from the negative, you will find time for the positives in your lifetime for family, friends and prayer. Happy Lent and may your fasting be a really positive experience this year:

When you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that nobody will know that you are fasting except your Father (Matt 6:17)

**Today: think carefully about what you are going to do, for the better, this Lent**



*Image from Qumran2.net*

We can pray:

**God of love, rich in justice and mercy, may my Lenten journey of fasting, prayer and almsgiving open my heart to reach out to others with love and joy, recognising that Christ is present. Amen. (Cafod prayer)**



## Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> February 2021

In our gospel today from Luke, we see the radical nature of being a Christian. It is not enough to say a few prayers, go to a church on Sunday and put some money into a collection. Christianity is not an 'add on' rather like we can buy extras for our mobile phone or satellite tv options. Christianity must permeate our lives fully—being a Christian becomes as natural as breathing the air we share. Jesus invites us to be true followers and **'take up the cross every day'** (Lk 6: 23).



*Adapted from an image by CongerDesign on Pixabay*

As a global family, we have been given a cross to carry during these past twelve months. It is a cross that we have embraced with courage, fully aware of its difficulties and problems. We have been asked to turn away from those very things that make us human: a loving touch, a hug or a kiss. Each of us have a cross to carry during these difficult times—some of us can carry it better than others, but carry it we must.

**Today: do your best to lighten the load of others—do not make demands of them**

We pray:

**God of life, may my choices be guided by your love so that all people may live to their full potential. Amen.**

## Friday 19<sup>th</sup> February 2021

Today's gospel from Matthew shows potential allies of Jesus questioning the concept of 'fasting'; the followers of John want to know why they and the pharisees have to fast, while the followers of Jesus seem to have an easy time and do not have to fast. On the surface it seems petty, the stuff of playground taunts; but Jesus makes a valid point with these enquirers. The apostles of Jesus have no need to fast while he is with them, but there will be times when they will feel abandoned, alone and distraught. It is precisely in these times of emptiness that the power of fasting will enter their lives, as he reminds them:

**'the time will come for the bridegroom to be taken away from them, and then they will fast.'** (Matt 9: 15).

Appreciate your loved ones more than ever today: talk to them, celebrate with them, laugh with them, pray with them—there may come a time when they could be just a loving memory.

**Today: reach out to someone you have lost touch with, perhaps over a silly row or misunderstanding.**

We pray:

**Lord, bless those I can celebrate and enjoy life with; even in this time of pandemic, may I reach out to them so that they know exactly how precious they are to me in life. Amen**



*Adapted from an image by Geralt on Pixabay*

**Listen and watch:** 'When I Needed a Neighbour' by the **Sloane Square Chamber Choir**

<https://youtu.be/pXiHcpsMJxs>

## **Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> March 2021**

In the gospel of Luke today, we witness the call of Levi, the tax collector. Like all men of his profession, Levi was disliked because he worked for the Roman army of occupation and he forced his fellow townsfolk to pay exorbitant taxes. In thanksgiving for his calling, Levi invites Jesus to be guest of honour in his home—Jesus is sitting down at table with public sinners, those shunned by 'good society'. I love how this account is portrayed in the amazing film, 'Jesus of Nazareth'; directed by Franco Zeffirelli: we see Peter and the apostles identify with the scribes and pharisees of today's reading:

**Why do you eat with tax collectors and sinners?** (Luke 5: 30)



In the context of this 'scandalous' meal, Zeffirelli inserts the favourite parable, **'The Prodigal Son'** (see Lk 15: 11-32): Levi is the younger son of the story, who has turned away from his father's love, while Peter, the rock, is the older one who remains faithful—their embrace of friendship at the end of the scene symbolises what a good Lent is all about—although this year, that reconciliation has to be 'socially distanced'.

Jesus' mission is not to the those who are good, because **'it is not those who are well who need the doctor but the sick. I have not come to call the virtuous, but sinners to repentance.'** (Lk 5: 31-32).

All of us have something to feel guilty about as we reflect on these words today; all of us have need, just like Levi and his friends, of that loving care of Jesus in our lives. Perhaps some of us need to come down from our moral high ground and fully embrace our own need for compassion, empathy and understanding. We are called to live in the 'field hospital' envisioned by Pope Francis

Today watch this extract from the film, 'Jesus of Nazareth': <https://youtu.be/w7c-XY695hk>

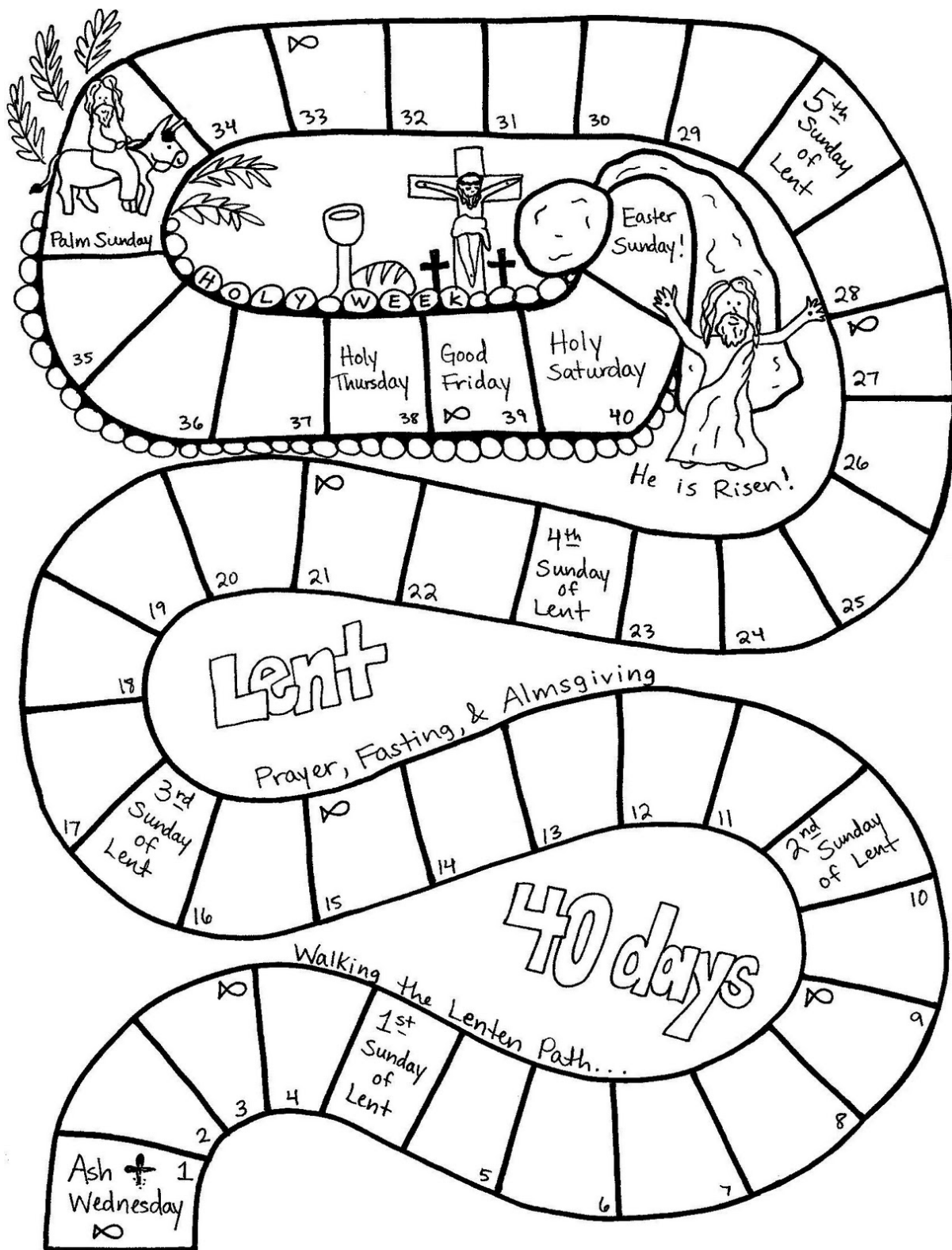


*'Return of the Prodigal', Rembrandt, Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons*

We pray:

**Lord, we thank you for the gift of forgiveness in our lives; we thank you for acceptance, care and love. Grant that, today, we can be less judgemental and more open to your message of peace and goodwill to all. Guide our steps today and may we follow your path more closely. Amen**

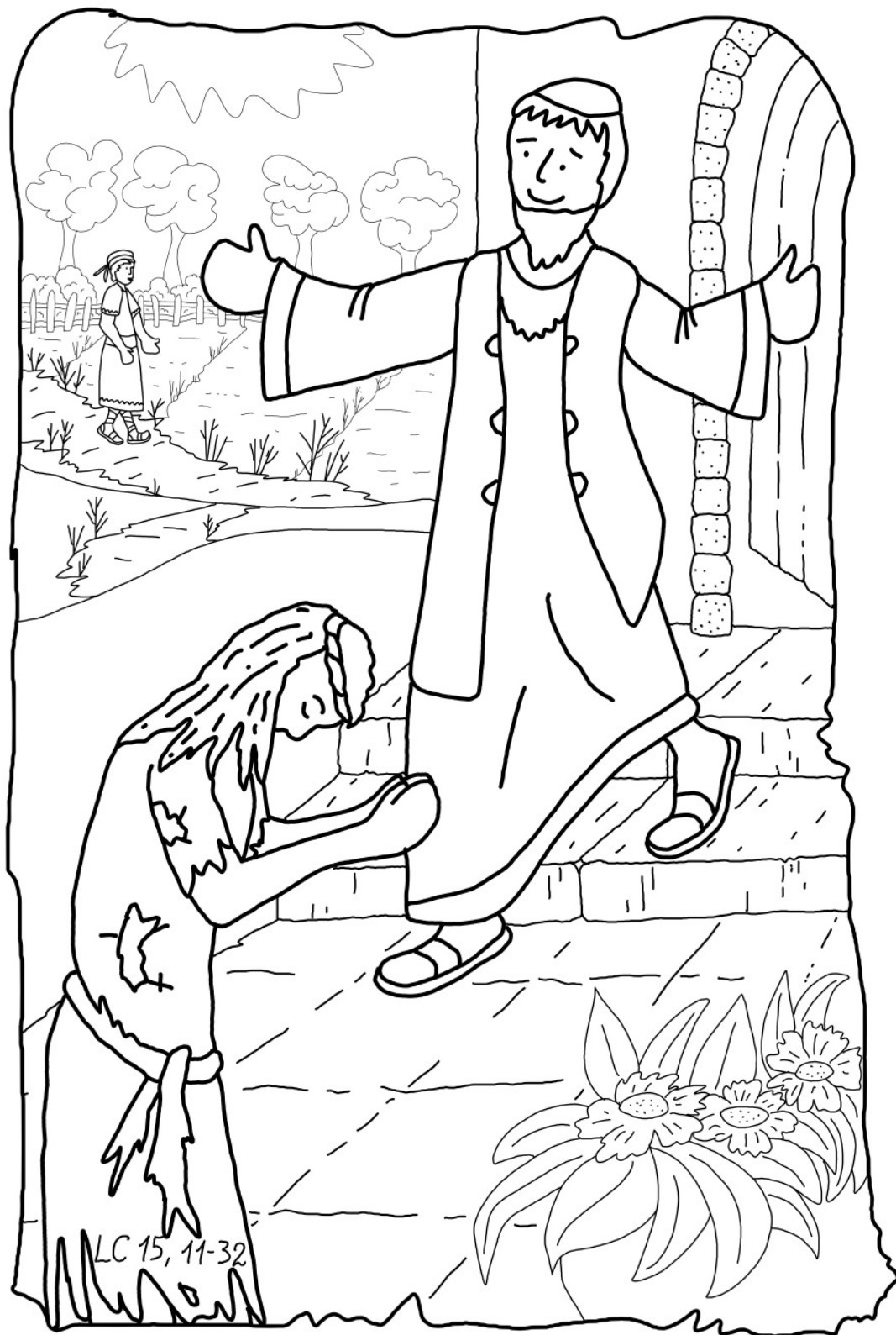
For children:



Lenten calendar from <https://www.catholicicing.com>

From <https://coloringhome.com>





By Virna Maria OV via Qumran2.net