**FAChurch February 22, 2023 Lent Devotion**

Two things I value greatly from my Catholic upbringing are the emphasis on the Lord’s Prayer and the practice of Lent. I begin every intentional prayer time with the Lord’s Prayer and every year at this time I find a way to observe Lent.

Lent 2023 (Wednesday, February 22nd to Saturday, April 8th) is a time of meditation on the sacrifice Jesus made for us at Easter. Lent is a Christian annual period that starts on Ash Wednesday lasting for 40 days (not Including Sundays) representing the 40 days Jesus spent fasting in the wilderness. This 40-day period for Christians is a time to reflect, fast, and repent in preparation for the resurrection of Christ Easter Sunday. Maybe it’s a season you haven’t given much time or attention to in the past, but you want to start this year and make the most of this time of repentance and reflection. Or maybe you want to try something new this year.

Personally, I am going to journal through the Gospels this Lent (more on that in a bit). I also plan to fast each day as the early church practiced by having one meal in the evening, except for Sundays. On Sundays I will eat two meals (lunch and dinner). This will give me 40 days of daily fasting. Then after my evening meal on Maundy Thursday (to honor the Last Supper) I will fast until breakfast at the church on Sunday morning. Fasting is not for everyone, but I believe God will empower me during this time. There is no food restriction during mealtimes.

On Good Friday (April 7th), FAC will be open starting at 9am (The Third Hour or the beginning of the crucifixion) for prayer and reflection in the sanctuary. There will be a reading of Luke 23:26-49 (The Crucifixion of Jesus Christ) at 3pm. After a time of prayer ending at 4pm, the church will be closed and quiet until Sunday morning as we gather for breakfast at 9am and Easter service at 10:30am.

Now, let’s talk about how to incorporate reading, writing, and truly meditating on God’s Word during this season through journaling through the Gospels during Lent.

Again, there are 40 days from Ash Wednesday (February 22nd) to Holy Saturday (April 8th) excluding Sundays. With 89 chapters in the four Gospels that would mean reading two chapters each day during the week and 4 chapters on Saturdays, except for Holy Saturday. Your Gospel reading plan will be complete on Good Friday.

Reading and journaling through books of the Bible has so many benefits! It can

1. Help you grow your understanding and appreciation of the life and teachings of Christ Jesus. Writing down your thoughts and reflections will help you digest and remember the text and keep it in your heart.
2. Inspire you to think about Christ’s life and how it reflects upon your own.
3. Remind you of His love. The Holy Spirit will speak to you in a personal way about God’s great love for you, shown in bodily form by Jesus.
4. Encourage you to turn away from anything in your life that misses the mark of holiness (being set apart for Him) that we are called to in Jesus Christ.

What needs to go?

1. Show you what areas you need to grow in your faith and Christian walk.

What needs to grow? **(This coincides with our current series on the Fruit of the Spirit)**

1. Keep you engaged. It’s easy to read the Bible and get distracted mentally and not really take everything in. Journaling causes you to meditate upon and respond in a personal, in-depth way.
2. Help you share Christ with a friend. Partner up with someone you know who is curious about Jesus and talk on a regular basis about what you’re learning through journaling through the gospels.

Once you get started, take notes on key passages, and reflect on how they relate to you personally, to your life, your marriage or relationship, friendships, work, community, and faith. Write down questions you have about Jesus’ life, His teachings, what He’s saying to you. Write down new insights, new learnings, new understandings.

Sometimes, we can read a chapter or a story that we’ve read time and time again, but reading it again we learn something completely new, or have an entirely different perspective on it. We learn from the Apostle Paul that the Word of God is alive and active (Hebrews 4:12) so the Holy Spirit can speak into us in new ways from something we learned a long time ago!

For verses that really jump off the page, you can write them on 3x5 cards and memorize them, driving them further into your daily life. If you’re struggling in a certain area of your life, you might want to write down verses that pertain to that area such as forgiveness, compassion, repentance (well-suited for Lent!), or people Jesus encountered who needed a miracle. You may find passages that you know the Lord is inspiring you to share with a friend or family member who is going through a particular crisis. Go for it!

Journaling helps you see connections between the Word and your own personal life. You can’t help it! When you read about Jesus’ life, envision his travels, conversations, and controversial teachings, you can’t help but wonder what He might say or do directly to you. Ask Him and record what you think He’s saying! The Holy Spirit will inspire you through the Bible readings to lean into His voice. You might ask questions like:

* How does this passage apply to my life today?
* What is God speaking to me about?
* How is my heart affected by the reading?
* Do I feel resistance in my spirit? Uncomfortable? Challenged

Journaling may be a new spiritual practice for you. That’s great! It will draw you closer to the throne of God and encourage you as you become more like Jesus and more into the person He’s creating you to be.

Keep it up and you’ll have a record of your spiritual journey and transformation!

Don’t let this Lent season pass by without diving into journaling through the gospels. Even if you start late or miss a day (or two or three), keep going! You can always continue after Easter. There’s no rule book here. Just keep going.

You may decide to give something up for Lent such as fasting one meal a day, or giving up eating chocolate, or drinking wine, or spending time on social media. That’s wonderful! It’ll only increase your attention to God’s Word and His inspiration during this season.

I hope you will consider joining me on this observance of Lent 2023!