



Contemplating Lent – Invitation to Growth

In the midst of our busy lives, the season of Lent is upon us, almost unannounced! It is early this year and maybe that is divine providence in our very troubled world...so much division, so much need, so many differences and seemingly no time to listen to 'the other'.

Lent is a precious opportunity for us, individually and communally, to stop and reflect...the opportunity to consider the opportunities and challenges that face us...Lent asks us to open our lives and hearts once again to God...

Growth, transformation and deeper faith are offered: will we accept? (Monaghan, C. 2023)

How will we travel the Lenten journey? Who will be our companions?

Chris Monaghan reminds us that '*our personal challenges and frailties will still be our well-known companions*' during Lent but we are reminded that God is on the journey with us too. The Scripture Readings of Lent are our food for the journey – we need to take time to feast on them! St Francis de Sales reminds us to '*have patience in all things, but, first of all with yourself.*' (Monaghan, C. 2023)

What is the wisdom of Catherine – our Companion on the Journey?

Life was more austere in Catherine's day so Lent would have been a particular time of abstinence.

However, as always Catherine was countercultural and focused on Lent as a time for deepening charity, practising practical compassion, and making a daily commitment to spiritual growth – a time for being and doing. Her approach emphasized 'mercy' as a living action, often summarized by her focus on feeding the hungry, caring for the marginalised, and acting with kindness.



Key Themes in a Catherine McAuley-inspired reflection on Lent include:

1. Daily Conversion and Growth

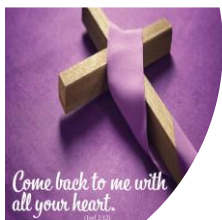
Catherine believed in steady, daily progress rather than just grand, one-time gestures. She is quoted as saying, "*The simplest and most practical lesson I know is to resolve to be good today, but better tomorrow*". Lent is thus a 40-day, step-by-step journey toward becoming more like Christ.

2. Radical Charity and Compassion

As Pope Francis and now Pope Leo XIV emphasise, we must prioritise serving those in need, even at personal cost. Catherine was committed to action in response to need - her spirit is captured in the ethos: "*Better to feed a hundred impostors than one poor hungry soul be turned away*". This inspires the opportunity for a group or individual Lenten focus on:

- **Active Ministry:** Engaging directly with the poor, sick, and those in need.
- **Hospitality:** Seeing Christ in every stranger and offering genuine, warm welcome.
- **Gentleness:** Emphasizing the "kind word, the gentle, compassionate look, and the patient hearing of their sorrows".

3. "**Let Charity be our Badge of Honour**" so that it could be said there is "but one heart and one soul in God".



Contemplating Lent – Invitation to Growth

Within Catherine's wisdom there is an invitation to Growth – remembering that God is on the journey too:

- **"Carrying" rather than "dragging" the cross:** Finding ways to accept life's hardships with grace rather than resentment.
- **Letting go:** Releasing the need for control and the weight of unforgiveness.
- **Focusing on the "now":** Making the most of the current moment to act with love.

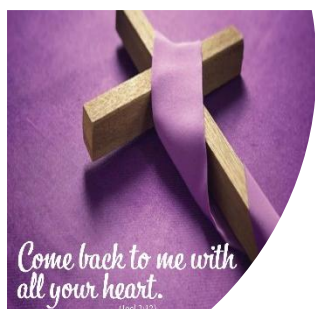
The *Suscipe* is especially poignant to pray or sing during Lent

A central, reflective prayer attributed to Catherine McAuley, often used during Lent, is the *Suscipe* (or Prayer of Trust), which emphasizes total surrender to God's will:

*"My God, I am yours for time and eternity,
Lord, I am yours forever.
It is You must teach me to trust in Your Providence,
loving Lord! ...
Take from my heart all painful anxiety,
Let nothing sadden me but sin.
And let my delight be hoping to see Your Face God,
my all."*



Mercy is... Creating a hospitable space for all. Generosity of heart and soul. Listening without judgment. Spreading peace in a broken world. Trusting in one another. Loving those who have hurt you. A journey of ups and downs. Patience for when things don't go as planned. Gratitude for the small moments. Hope that we can all find healing. Believing in the goodness of every individual. Seeing God in all things. Love. Bekah Kornblum '15: Sacramento, California Former support person for the Sacramento Mercy Volunteer



In summary, a Lenten reflection based on Catherine McAuley moves beyond just fasting or giving up items. It is a "continuous act of praise and prayer" that transforms the individual into a more compassionate, loving presence in the world.