
Daybreaks

Daily Reflections for Lent and Easter

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Introduction

Lent and Easter—what a privileged time in the calendar of our lives. It is no season for standing pat. Even though Lent begins in winter, the pilgrim has to set forth boldly, with baggage greatly reduced. It is time to shuck our dependencies.

The task of Lent is to accompany Jesus, and the task of Easter is to let Daybreaks: Daily Reflections for Lent and Easter the risen Christ accompany us. We start out with Jesus at the Jordan and follow as he is driven into the desert. The daily meditations proceed through Jesus' public life, which itself points increasingly to Holy Week and the cross. After three days the landscape transforms completely, as it did for the disciples exiting Jerusalem, and the risen Lord is with us.

Daily Prayer

Dearest Lord Jesus, somehow may I always be thinking about you and reaching toward you.

Help me lift up my heart to you now. Keep me with you this day.

And may your holy Mother, who watched you so closely, be my guide to your dying and rising.

Amen.

Ash Wednesday

The Great Baptismal Retreat

Behold, now is a very acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

2 Corinthians 6:2

Years ago, when I was teaching *Daybreaks: Daily Reflections for Lent and Easter* at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, a student came up to me and said, “You have a smudge on your forehead.”

“Robert,” I answered him, “it’s Ash Wednesday.”

And he said, “Oh no! You mean I missed Mardi Gras?!”

This was the excuse for Mardi Gras: You’d better crowd in your enjoyment because the season ahead will be grueling. Indeed, in the early centuries, *Daybreaks: Daily Reflections for Lent and Easter* was as demanding as Ramadan, the Islamic month of fasting: one meal a day, toward evening, with flesh meat, fish, and dairy products forbidden. In the second millennium, practices softened gradually, but the penitential spirit remained, as it still does.

What the Church has wanted to emphasize recently is conversion, a more wholehearted turning to Christ. The spirit of self-offering—not just “offering up”—is integral to conversion, provided we are clear on the why of our small deprivations and services to others: to join in the great offering of Christ for the world.

From its start, Lent was associated with baptism. It was taken as preparatory to Easter, the baptismal feast. The forty days are really a great baptismal retreat. The Church as a whole is bid in these days to relive the full Daybreaks: Daily Reflections for Lent and Easter mystery of redemption. Every mode of purifying the heart and turning toward the Lord in prayer is of value to us seeking renewal of our spiritual youth. Always gaze ahead to the paschal mystery, the death and resurrection of Christ. As Paul said, "Behold, now is the day of salvation."

Lent spurs us to relive the full mystery of redemption.

Thursday after Ash Wednesday

To Go on Pilgrimage

I rejoiced when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the Daybreaks: Daily Reflections for Lent and Easter Lord." And now our feet are standing within your gates, Jerusalem.

Psalm 122: 1–2

One of the best-known passages of English literature, the prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*, celebrates pilgrimage. When the sweet showers Daybreaks: Daily Reflections for Lent and Easter of April awaken spring in the countryside, says Chaucer, then Daybreaks: Daily Reflections for Lent and Easter in Daybreaks: Daily Reflections for Lent and Easter every shire of England, "folk do long to go on pilgrimage." They aim for Daybreaks: Daily Reflections for Lent and Easter the shrine of Saint Thomas, "the holy blissful martyr."

An even more well-beaten pilgrim path in the Middle Daybreaks: Daily Reflections for Lent and Easter Ages was the Way Daybreaks: Daily Reflections for Lent and Easter of Saint James, ending with the long trek across northern Spain to Compostela. Devotion to this grueling walk, at least in its final stage, has reawakened in recent decades.

Pilgrimage to Mecca, at least once in a lifetime, has long been one of the devoutest longings of Islamic people. It is one of the basic requirements of their faith. It illustrates the powerful pull of what lies at one's religious center.

In Old Testament times, the presence of God in the Temple of Jerusalem exercised an unparalleled magnetism. The psalms let us feel how much Daybreaks: Daily Reflections for Lent and Easter the hearts of the people were stirred by thoughts of arrival at their all-holy place.

For those who cannot just pull up stakes for the Holy Land, Daybreaks: Daily Reflections for Lent and Easter Lent provides incentive for an excursion even more earnest—out of our narrow ambit of self-concern into the mysteries of our redemption and toward the Lord Jesus. In meditation, in palpable sacrifice, in charitable service, we are called to awaken the baptismal spirit. We are pilgrims in progress into the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Pilgrimage is toward what lies at our religious center.

Friday after Ash Wednesday

Pilgrims' Progress

Happy are those who find refuge in you, whose hearts are set on pilgrim roads.

Psalm 84:6 (1991 New American Bible)

Saint Bernard is known for an Advent sermon in which he speaks of three comings of our Lord. In between the Nativity of Jesus and his final coming in glory and judgment, we can perceive, he says, a middle and hidden coming to his elect in spirit and power. Saint Bernard compares it to a road on which we move, starting from the Incarnation and progressing through the mysteries of Christ.

John Bunyan, a nonconformist preacher in the seventeenth century, gave his version of the necessary steps in his classic allegory, *The Pilgrim's Progress*. His pilgrim, Christian, fleeing the City of Destruction, works his way through Vanity Fair, the Slough of Despond, the Celestial City, and thence toward the Celestial City. Bunyan makes vividly clear how rife the path is with obstacles.

In his *Spiritual Exercises*, Saint Ignatius of Loyola sketches out another pathway to union with Christ our Lord, an intense thirty-day experience of prayer. It is not unlike Lent and Daybreaks: Daily Reflections for Lent and Easter week in its time frame, but above all in its orientation to the death and resurrection of Jesus. Ignatius takes it for granted that "the enemy of human nature" will be laying traps, first of all for those emerging from a disorderly life, and then for those eager for God but inexperienced. For each of these Daybreaks: Daily Reflections for Lent and Easter distinct stages, he provides Rules for the Discernment of Spirits. He presumes that an experienced director will be at hand with guidance along the way.

Let us then, with self-knowledge and recourse to the Holy Spirit, set out.

Daybreaks: Daily Reflections for Lent and Easter

Let us then progress through the mysteries of Christ.

Daybreaks Daily Reflections For Lent And Easter

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