



Introduction

Perhaps the title of this series makes you think of the 1984 song called "Purple Rain" by Prince. Perhaps not. But this is not the Prince we focus on in Lent. Instead we companion the Prince of Peace, who is Jesus Christ, the one who came to save humanity from the storm of sin. He's not a pop star. He's something so much greater!

The title of this Lenten series offers a new image for us to sit with, one that departs slightly from the traditional desert imagery so customary to Lent. We know that the 40 days of Lent

commemorates Jesus' 40 days of testing in the desert before beginning his ministry. But for an average Christian, it's hard to relate to the desert. If Lent is going to provide us any growth we need the rain in addition to the sun.

A Picture

Imagine a seedling rising above the soil. The sun beats down on it, drying it up, risking its demise. But then a powerful afternoon torrent passes. The rain also beats down upon the seedling's two tiny leaves, bending the seedling over, pushing it toward the ground. When the rain stops the clouds remain and the seedling looks just about dead. It seems there is little hope until the sun begins throwing gentle rays down on the seedling again. The rain dries up and the seedling, now nourished by both the rain and the sun, begins to rise up strong and grow.

We need the sun *and* the rain.

Lent is a time for the purifying sun and rain so we can emerge into the Easter sun made new. And purple is the colour not just of royalty—a sign we share in Christ's kingship—but also the colour of the Christian desire for spiritual growth.

***Purple Rain* is a response for our desire to seek that spiritual growth in the Lenten season.**

How To Use This Packet

Really, it's up to you. As a leader of faith formation, whether in a parish or on a university campus, you're invited to use this packet simply as a tool in your Lenten planning. The following pages offer weekly handouts (two pages each) that begin with the week of Ash Wednesday and ending on Holy Week. You can use these handouts to form the structure of a Lenten faith sharing group or a prayer service. Or offer them to people as a resource for individual prayer.

Each week offers a quotation, a suggestion for music, a scripture reading (based on the lectionary cycle year B), a reflection, and discussion prompts.

What you'll find is a diverse set of reflections, themes, and questions. It's not *all* about penance. In fact, the important theme of baptism enters into *Purple Rain*, a theme sometimes overlooked during Lent. Hopefully *Purple Rain* will be a starting point for rich Lenten reflection.

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"[Lent is] particularly appropriate for spiritual exercises, penitential liturgies, pilgrimages as signs of penance, voluntary self-denial such as fasting and almsgiving, and fraternal sharing (charitable and missionary works)."

(Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1438)

MUSIC SUGGESTION: DUST WE ARE AND SHALL RETURN - THE BRILLIANCE

WORD

JOEL 2:12-14

Even now, says the LORD,
return to me with your whole heart,
with fasting, and weeping, and mourning;
Rend your hearts, not your garments,
and return to the LORD, your God.
For gracious and merciful is he,
slow to anger, rich in kindness,
and relenting in punishment.
Perhaps he will again relent
and leave behind him a blessing,
Offerings and libations
for the LORD, your God.

REFLECTION

ANDY OTTO

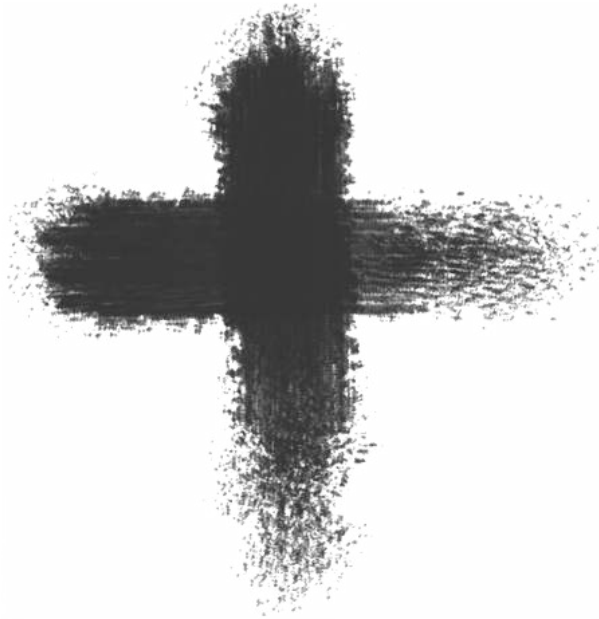
Lent is a time to develop ourselves so we come out on the other side (Easter) more prepared to avoid sinful tendencies and habits that are not life-giving and that do not bring us closer to God. Ascetical Lenten practices actually help us in this. But no one's suggesting self-flagellation or walking a mile on your knees. In fact, asceticism actually means to train or exercise, as in training like an athlete; it's not about self-denial.

Here's my suggestion: Take a look at the ascetical practices that already happen every day, those little things that offer the opportunity to build spiritual strength. Parenting may be one – how does parenting help you "train"? Maybe you have a long commute like me – does it give you time to grow closer to God at all? Tough relationships are also opportunities to exercise charity and love of neighbour. Even cooking for another can be considered an ascetical practice if it helps you develop your love for others.

Asceticism happens every day. Part of finding God in all things is noticing the little daily opportunities to change our attitude toward sin and bring us closer to God. It's the penance of noticing.

DISCUSSION

1. What do I hope the Lord will "leave behind" for me this Lent?
2. We do not always have to rend our garments or "give something up" during Lent. God asks us primarily to rend our hearts. How can I do that this Lenten season?
3. The ashes of Ash Wednesday mark visibly our sinful nature, but they also mark our need for repentance. What do I need to repent and seek forgiveness for in my life?
4. How have I experienced God's mercy in my life? When have I questioned it?



Discover some other ideas for Lenten practices here:
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