

Lent Reflections 2026. Week 1: February 18th – 24th

A general introduction to the season of Lent and to these Reflections.

In most countries, the day before Lent is celebrated as a feast day. In England, the old name of Shrove Tuesday has largely been discarded in favour of "Pancake Day" with people making special trips to the shops to buy the necessary ingredients. A few hundred years ago this would have been unimaginable as the whole point of Shrove Tuesday was to use up foods forbidden during Lent. Supplies were gradually run down as Lent approached until, on Shrove Tuesday, any remaining eggs, milk, butter and animal fats were used up in the pancake feast.

The forty days of Lent are used by the Church to reflect on the time spent by Christ in the wilderness and Christians are encouraged to engage in self-examination and repentance; prayer, fasting and self denial; reading and meditating on God's word. It is my hope and prayer that these reflections - sent out weekly - will help you to observe Lent in this way.

Each week you will receive a set of daily reflections, Bible readings and prayers. The Bible passages for each day are those suggested in the BRF Lent Book: Giving It Up by Maggi Dawn

Wednesday, February 18th. Ash Wednesday: Psalm 103,8-18

The LORD is merciful and gracious,

slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

9 He will not always accuse,

nor will he keep his anger for ever.

10 He does not deal with us according to our sins,

nor repay us according to our iniquities.

11 For as the heavens are high above the earth,

so great is his steadfast love towards those who fear him;

12 as far as the east is from the west,

so far he removes our transgressions from us.

13 As a father has compassion for his children,

so the LORD has compassion for those who fear him.

14 For he knows how we were made;

he remembers that we are dust.

15 As for mortals, their days are like grass;

they flourish like a flower of the field;

16 for the wind passes over it, and it is gone,

and its place knows it no more.

17 But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting

on those who fear him,

and his righteousness to children's children,

18 to those who keep his covenant

and remember to do his commandments.

Anyone who is familiar with the Church of England funeral service will recognise within this passage, the words used at a committal.

God, we're told, remembers that we came from dust, and we are invited to remember it again at our Ash Wednesday services when, whilst being marked with a cross of ashes we are told: remember that you are dust, and to dust you will return. So we brought, starkly, even harshly, face to face with a sense of our own mortality. But these words are also resonant with those of Genesis 3,19 when God told Adam: for dust you are and to dust you will return. Whilst these words were spoken in anger and grief at Adam's disobedience, they also marked the start of humankind's journey towards redemption and ultimate reconciliation with God. Through this season of Lent we journey in sorrow and repentance, but also in hope and trust, towards a fresh understanding of that salvation.

Collect for Ash Wednesday

Almighty and everlasting God,
you hate nothing that you have made
and forgive the sins of all those who are penitent:
create and make in us new and contrite hearts
that we, worthily lamenting our sins,
and acknowledging our wretchedness,
may receive from you, the God of all mercy,
Perfect remission and forgiveness;
through Jesus Christ your Son, our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever. Amen

Thursday, February 19th: Isaiah 58,6-12

Is not this the fast that I choose:

to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?

⁷ Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover them,
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?

⁸ Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up quickly;
your vindicator^[a] shall go before you,
the glory of the LORD shall be your rearguard.

⁹ Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer;
you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.

If you remove the yoke from among you,
the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,

¹⁰ if you offer your food to the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,
then your light shall rise in the darkness

and your gloom be like the noonday.
11 The LORD will guide you continually,
and satisfy your needs in parched places,
and make your bones strong;
and you shall be like a watered garden,
like a spring of water,
whose waters never fail.
12 Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;
you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;
you shall be called the repairer of the breach,
the restorer of streets to live in.

After the fun and feasting of "Pancake Day" comes the solemnity of Ash Wednesday and now we're into the business of our Lenten fast. What have you given up - and why?

In our passage from Isaiah, the prophet seems to suggest that God isn't really interested in what we do or don't eat and drink. What is far more important is the way in which we care for his creation and our fellow human beings. This doesn't mean that the practice of giving something up is pointless - it is a good discipline, especially if it helps us to focus on how we might change our shopping habits to benefit others or the environment.

According to statistics for 2025, the UK wastes about 9.5 million tonnes of food each year. Maggi Dawn suggests that instead of giving up desserts, coffee, etc, this Lent we all give up an hour or two each week to rethink our shopping and cooking habits so that we buy and cook only what we need, use up leftovers and reduce unnecessary waste.

Prayer

Heavenly Father,

You provide our needs and bless us with more than we need.

Help us to be careful and wise in our use of your resources, not thoughtless or wasteful.

We give thanks for all who produce our food and other goods and pray that they too will husband your earth with care and consideration for all your creation.

Amen.

Friday, February 20th: Luke 12, 22-34

22 He said to his disciples, 'Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. **23** For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. **24** Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! **25** And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?^[a] **26** If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest? **27** Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin;^[e] yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. **28** But if God so clothes the grass of the field,

which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! ²⁹ And do not keep striving for what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. ³⁰ For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things, and your Father knows that you need them. ³¹ Instead, strive for his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

³² 'Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. ³³ Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. ³⁴ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

In modern times, if we give up anything at all for Lent, it is likely to be a luxury - chocolate, coffee etc. Increasingly, people opt to take something up rather than engage in any form of fasting. We give up things that are bad for us or take up self-improvement regimes. Originally, though, Lent was concerned only with food - not habits- and the foods given up were essentials, not luxuries.

This Lent, let's try to recapture the old, true meaning of the season and the fast, recognising that we are dependent on God for life itself; that no self-improvement regime can change God's opinion of us - he loves us just as we are - and understanding that sincerity of heart is what he wants most from us. Perhaps the real thing to give up this Lent is our ego

Prayer

Heavenly Father,

We thank you that you meet all our needs. Give us, we pray, grace to both trust in your provision and to be satisfied with it. Forgive us when pride, vanity and greed make us strive for material possessions and worldly status, relying on our own strength rather than your goodness and love.

Amen.

Saturday, February 21st: Micah 6,1-8

Hear what the LORD says:

Rise, plead your case before the mountains,
and let the hills hear your voice.

² Hear, you mountains, the controversy of the LORD,
and you enduring foundations of the earth;
for the LORD has a controversy with his people,
and he will contend with Israel.

³ 'O my people, what have I done to you?
In what have I wearied you? Answer me!

⁴ For I brought you up from the land of Egypt,
and redeemed you from the house of slavery;
and I sent before you Moses,
Aaron, and Miriam.

⁵ O my people, remember now what King Balak of Moab devised,

what Balaam son of Beor answered him,
and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal,
that you may know the saving acts of the LORD.'

⁶ 'With what shall I come before the LORD,
and bow myself before God on high?
Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings,
with calves a year old?

⁷ Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,
with tens of thousands of rivers of oil?
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?'

⁸ He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the LORD require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with you

These words from Micah may well remind us of our words from Isaiah on Thursday. Both are concerned with justice and the way in which we treat others and such issues can have a link to our Lent fast. We have considered reviewing our shopping and eating habits with regard to waste, but now think again about where your food comes from; is it locally sourced? Do those who produce it treated well and paid a fair wage?

In the past, when everyone fasted for Lent, people were encouraged to give up a whole meal on a given day, donating the money saved to the care of the poor and needy. Could you do that this Lent; go without one meal on one day of each week and give either the ingredients - if suitable - or the cost of the meal to your local food bank?

We live in a world where almost half of the world's wealth is owned by 1% of the people and far too many are homeless, hungry and living in poverty.

As individuals we can't help everybody but we can make a contribution and if everybody made a contribution, however small, what a difference it would make!

Prayer

Generous God,

You are the God of love and justice,

Give us generous hearts that love to give as freely as we receive and courage to speak and act in the cause of justice for all your people.

Amen.

Sunday February 22nd: Luke 5,33-39

³³ Then they said to him, 'John's disciples, like the disciples of the Pharisees, frequently fast and pray, but your disciples eat and drink.' ³⁴ Jesus said to them, 'You cannot make wedding-guests fast while the bridegroom is with them, can you? ³⁵ The days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days.' ³⁶ He also told them a parable: 'No one tears a piece from a new garment and sews it on an old garment; otherwise the new will be torn,

and the piece from the new will not match the old. ³⁷ And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the new wine will burst the skins and will be spilled, and the skins will be destroyed. ³⁸ But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins. ³⁹ And no one after drinking old wine desires new wine, but says, "The old is good."^[k]

What is Jesus saying in this parable? Maggi Dawn suggests that he praises neither new nor old above the other. Rather, he says that they exist alongside each other and that this is an example of how church should be. For the Church to thrive, it needs both the richness of tradition and the vibrancy of fresh, new ways of worship. Both can bring people to God but if either are forced on people, or pushed into unsuitable formats, then all is spoilt and wasted.

As part of your Lent discipline this year, ask yourself how wedded you are to your own preferred style of worship and how open you are to other styles. Try to see what might attract others to styles of worship which don't appeal to you. Can you value them, even if they don't "work" for you? Thank God for the rich diversity we find within the Christian faith and for the central truth we all share: the love of God and the saving grace of his Son, Jesus Christ.

Prayer

Loving Jesus, Lord and Saviour of all,

We thank you that you delight in our love and worship, however it is offered. We thank you for the diverse ways in which we may come to you - through vibrant art and music and through stillness and contemplation; in large groups or in solitude.

We thank you that all you ask of us is sincerity of heart. Give us grace to honour and respect all who seek to honour you and to worship you in sincerity of heart and mind. Amen.

Monday, February 23rd: Matthew 4,1-4

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. ³ The tempter came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.' ⁴ But he answered, 'It is written,

"One does not live by bread alone,

but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."

For the remainder of this first week of Lent, we focus on the time Jesus spent in the wilderness. It is unlikely that he was literally forty days there; forty is used symbolically throughout the Bible to indicate periods of preparation and transformation. (Can you think of any examples?). So, here, it is used to indicate the importance of this fast as Jesus prepared for his public ministry. However long it actually was, the time of fasting helped Jesus to focus on his priorities, and the temptations he faced sum up every major kind of temptation we ever have to deal with.

The first temptation concerned basic physical needs - hunger for food. Jesus, hungry, thirsty and no doubt exhausted, could have done as Satan suggested. Instead, he reminded Satan - and us - that there is more to life than an endless round of earning, cooking, eating and sleeping. Nonetheless, we are human with

needs to be satisfied. Maggi Dawn writes (paraphrased): One purpose of a Lenten fast may be to remind ourselves that we are creatures with a physical being and to take adequate care of that physical body. At the same time, we also have spiritual and moral capabilities and these should guide our conduct.

Prayer

Heavenly Father,

We thank you that you love us and provide for our physical needs. Help us to remember that we are more than our bodies, and to come to you for spiritual and moral guidance, that we may always trust in your word and follow in your way. Amen.

Tuesday February 24th: Matthew 4,5-7

⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶ saying to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written,

"He will command his angels concerning you",
and "On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone."

⁷ Jesus said to him, 'Again it is written, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

In this second temptation, Jesus is invited to achieve instant fame and fortune by pulling a publicity stunt!

Spiritual gifts are a rich blessing and can bring immense benefit to many; but they can easily be misused, gaining the gifted one adulation which rightly belongs to God. Gifted preachers and church leaders are particularly vulnerable to this temptation, trusting in their own ability rather than God's grace. It is the responsibility of all Christians to pray for their ministers that they may be kept from this particular temptation.

Prayer

Lord of all,

We thank you for those who minister to us and lead us in our churches.

Give them, we pray, humility to recognise their own weaknesses and vulnerabilities that they may always trust in your strength alone, and mindful of their need of your grace and guidance.

Amen.