Fasten my heart to you, oh Lord

Introduction to the Study Materials – Lent 2024

Welcome! We pray that this Lenten season is a time for fruitful discussion and reflection. May it be a time to really notice the abundance that God bestows on us, every day of our lives.

As we do with each liturgical season, we can ask ourselves, “How am I responding to God’s Word? Where is my heart? How can I keep my life centered on Christ?”

This prayer from Joyce Rupp, can be our focus and guide this Lent to help us grow deeper in love and more connected to Christ. It is based on a quote from the English mystic, Julian of Norwich:

*“Prayer fastens the soul to God.”*

**Prayer of Fastening by Joyce Rupp:**

Fasten my entire heart to you, Love of all Loves, that all I am and do finds its motivation in you.

Fasten my mind to you, Inner Peace, that whatever stirs within leads to tranquility.

Fasten my days to you, Divine Presence, that in each happening I remain united with you.

Fasten my nights to you, Holy Darkness, that I find restoration in your embracing silence.

Fasten my joys to you, Delight of My Soul, that these memories comfort me in times of trouble.

Fasten my sorrows to you, Compassionate One, that I experience solace in your kindheartedness.

Fasten my desires to you, Eternal Flame, that my yearnings reflect the fire in your great heart.

Fasten my concerns to you, Trustworthy Confidante, that I withdraw my fears and place my trust in you.

Fasten my responsibilities to you, Sustainer of Strength, that my daily efforts evolve from a non-resistant spirit.

Fasten my relationships to you, Friend of My Heart, that your profuse love nurtures and sustains them.

Fasten my anguished world to you, Holder of Hope, that my dreams for justice and peace become a reality.

Fasten my prayer to you, Giver of Grace, that I might give myself ever fully to you.

*We ask all these things, through Christ, Our Lord, Amen*

(Prayer adapted from Joyce Rupp, *Prayer Seeds*, Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, In)

**Readings for February 11, 2024 – Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Fastened to Our Healer

*In today’s gospel reading, Jesus is “moved with pity” for the leper who approaches him in humility and trust. Jesus always wants the best for us. He stretches out his hand to us, always willing that we live healthy, whole, fulfilling lives that are aligned with God.*

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**Opening Prayer:** Dear Lord, as we begin this season of praying and sharing together, help us to open our hearts and minds; to see your presence and activity in each other, and to hear the message you want to send uniquely to each of us. Help us to bring healing and peace to others around us. Amen.

Reading I [**Lv 13:1-2, 44-46**](https://bible.usccb.org/bible/leviticus/13?1)

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron,
“If someone has on his skin a scab or pustule or blotch
which appears to be the sore of leprosy, he shall be brought to Aaron, the priest,
or to one of the priests among his descendants. If the man is leprous and unclean,
the priest shall declare him unclean by reason of the sore on his head.

“The one who bears the sore of leprosy shall keep his garments rent and his head bare,
and shall muffle his beard; he shall cry out, ‘Unclean, unclean!’
As long as the sore is on him he shall declare himself unclean,
since he is in fact unclean. He shall dwell apart, making his abode outside the camp.”

Responsorial Psalm [**Ps 32:1-2, 5, 11**](https://bible.usccb.org/bible/psalms/32?1)

**R. I turn to you, Lord, in time of trouble, and you fill me with the joy of salvation.**Blessed is he whose fault is taken away, whose sin is covered.
Blessed the man to whom the LORD imputes not guilt,
    in whose spirit there is no guile.
Then I acknowledged my sin to you, my guilt I covered not.
I said, “I confess my faults to the LORD,”  and you took away the guilt of my sin.

**R. I turn to you, Lord, in time of trouble, and you fill me with the joy of salvation.**Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, you just; exult, all you upright of heart.

**R. I turn to you, Lord, in time of trouble, and you fill me with the joy of salvation.**

Reading II [**1 Cor 10:31—11:1**](https://bible.usccb.org/bible/1corinthians/10?31)

Brothers and sisters, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do,
do everything for the glory of God.
Avoid giving offense, whether to the Jews or Greeks or the church of God,
just as I try to please everyone in every way,
not seeking my own benefit but that of the many,
that they may be saved. Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

Gospel [**Mk 1:40-45**](https://bible.usccb.org/bible/mark/1?40)

A leper came to Jesus and kneeling down begged him and said,
“If you wish, you can make me clean.”
Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand,
touched him, and said to him, “I do will it. Be made clean.”
The leprosy left him immediately, and he was made clean.
Then, warning him sternly, he dismissed him at once. He said to him, “See that you tell no one anything, but go, show yourself to the priest
and offer for your cleansing what Moses prescribed; that will be proof for them.” The man went away and began to publicize the whole matter.
He spread the report abroad so that it was impossible for Jesus to enter a town openly.
He remained outside in deserted places, and people kept coming to him from everywhere.

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Related Reflections

In today’s gospel, Jesus “stretched out His hand, touched [the leper], and said to him, ‘I do will it. Be made clean.’” Not only had the leper acted courageously in approaching Jesus, but our Lord did the unthinkable by stretching out His hand to touch the leper. Here was something new in Israel!

The Law required holiness to be preserved by not coming into contact with impurity, because impurity was contagious. Now, however, the holiness of Jesus reaches out and itself becomes contagious. It conquers and heals the impurity. Why? Because God wills it.

We can almost hear the delight in Jesus’ words when He makes this clear. This is exactly what He came to do. As Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis has written, “Christ’s fingers, which had so joyfully created man out of the clay of the earth, now exult as they receive admission into poor human flesh in need of regeneration” (*Fire of Mercy, Heart of the Word*, pg 324).

See the power of Jesus’ touch and words: “the leprosy left him immediately, and he was made clean.” This episode is wonderfully iconic of what the Church teaches us about a sacrament. Here, again, we are helped by Leiva-Merikakis: “In Christ’s action of healing as the visible sign of God’s invisible grace and the leper’s invisible faith, we have the perfect form of a sacrament.

The physical gesture of Jesus’ hand touching the man’s body accompanied by the words, ‘I want it; be healed!’ God’s intervention in the human scene becomes word that is saving act; man is to be invaded by the divine flood of life at every level of his being at once.”

Jesus sends the leper to the priest to be re-admitted to the worshiping liturgical community (just as we are sent to our priests when our sins separate us from worship). He also warns the man not to spread the news of what happened. Why? Jesus knew He needed time to complete His preaching mission to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. He did not want people to attempt to make him king prematurely, or for the wrong reason, nor did He want to arouse the suspicion of the authorities in Jerusalem. The leper couldn’t contain himself (do we blame him?). As a result, “people kept coming to [Jesus] from everywhere.”

What can we learn from the leper today? Not a bad question to ask ourselves. *Possible response:* Lord Jesus, I learn from the leper that You are delighted when I kneel before You to ask for healing, to cure my sin.

Gayle Somers, published on <https://catholicexchange.com/scripture-speaks-made-clean/>

**Be Made Clean**

A man walks up to Jesus covered with scales and scabs. According to prescriptions (found in our [First Reading](http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/021118.cfm)) the man should “dwell apart, making his abode outside the camp.” Thus, as long as the sores are on him he should ring a bell and cry “Unclean, unclean!” In approaching Jesus in the manner he does, the man is committing a terrible social blunder and he may be breaking the law too! In the face of all this, Jesus is not repulsed or shocked, he is “moved with pity.” Just three words, but they tell us so much.

Then a wonderful statement from the leper. “If you want to, you can make me clean.” What? Of course our savior wants to! Yet these words are a confession of faith on the part of the leper. Where did he get this trust of Jesus? Maybe his spiritual life had already begun.

Jesus’ remarkable answer: “I do want to.” Direct, honest, so revealing of God. The whole life of Jesus consists of a desire to give to people who are in trouble and who believe, even if they have only a small faith by which to receive, as well as large wounds.

In an extraordinary move, Jesus stretches out his hand and touches the man. As noted, the ancients thought that Leprosy was communicable, and at the very least disgusting. But Jesus touched him with care and said, “Be made clean.” Our spiritual life consists of being “made clean,” no matter how disgusting our failings may be. We must receive Jesus’ touch, especially his touch upon our souls.

So, here in the very first chapter of Mark, we find Jesus extending his mercy toward the leper and toward each of us. Spirituality and the Gospel have coincided. Look for more of the same as we make our way through Mark’s Gospel. – Fr. John Foley, S.J. - liturgy.slu.edu

**From Bishop Robert Barron:**

Once in the Lord’s presence, the leper knelt down and begged him for healing. The suffering man realizes who Jesus is: not one prophet among many, but the Incarnation of the God of Israel, the only one before whom worship is the appropriate attitude.

In our sickness, our weakness, our shame, our sin, our oddness—lots of us feel like this leper. We feel as though we’re just not worthy. But whatever trouble we are in, we have to come to Jesus in the attitude of worship. He is the Lord and we’re not. This is the key step in getting our lives in order: right praise.

Consider the leper’s beautiful plea, essential in any act of petitionary prayer: "If you wish, you can make me clean." He is not demanding; he is acknowledging the lordship of Jesus, his sovereignty. "Thy will be done" is always the right attitude in any prayer.

* wordonfire.org

**Meditation from Henri Nouwen:**

In solitude we can listen to the voice of him who spoke to us before we could speak a word, who healed us before we could make any gesture to help, who set us free long before we could free others, and who loved us long before we could give love to anyone.

 (*Draw Ever Closer,* Ave Maria Press)

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**Related scripture - Ezekiel 36:25-27**

“I will sprinkle clean water over you, and you shall be clean from all your impurities, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, so that you walk in my statutes, observe my ordinances, and keep them.”

Discussion Questions

In the first reading, ritual demanded that if you had leprosy you had to “tear your clothes, be excluded, live apart from those you loved, and announce your presence by shouting ‘unclean’”? Are some people treated in a similar way today? Give examples.

How does illness separate, or isolate us from the community?

Talk a little about the importance of healing in the life and teachings of the Church. Note: We have two sacraments, Anointing of the Sick, and Reconciliation, that are considered “sacraments of healing.”

Paul says, “Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God.” In which of your day’s activities is it easy for you to remember the presence of God? When is it harder?

Is it difficult to allow room for God’s will in making decisions, or in your general actions? Maybe we just forget to do this because we are used to getting things done, or being in charge?

How does it feel to know that Jesus wills the very best for us?

Take a few moments of silence and think about the image of Jesus stretching out his hand to you, as he does in our gospel reading. Notice how this feels and what you might be thinking. Try to notice what Jesus might be saying or doing here…

Do we realize how much Jesus “does will it” – how much he longs for us to be healed and whole, and enjoying life in friendship with him?

Can we feel gratitude for the many ways that Jesus is “moved with pity” for us?

As I realize all this about Jesus, what is my response?

(If you are willing, share about what came up for you in this time of meditation).

**Closing Prayer**

Jesus, gentle healer, stretch out your hand to me. Calm my troubled heart, and remind me that you are near – the stillness beneath the turmoil, the center of my very self. Let me rest there, and let me rise to a new day, ready to receive what you give me, and ready to love from your love that dwells within me. Amen. - (Adapted from a prayer by Henri Nouwen)

*“Oh Lord, I pray, fasten my soul to you.”*

Something to pray with this week

Spend some time this week with the Prayer of Fastening on the Introduction Page of this packet (by Joyce Rupp). You might consider the following questions:

How sturdy is the connection that fastens me to the divine as I enter this Lenten season?

Am I securely fastened to what most gives my life meaning and purpose?

What is loose and can be sewn more tightly? What might need some new thread?

What have I chosen this Lent to keep a closer bond with, and what will I let go of?

If you have time, read a little more about **Blessed Julian of Norwich (1342-1429?)**,an English mystic who wrote about sixteen visions she had of Jesus.

<https://julianofnorwich.org/pages/who-is-julian-of-norwich>

***One other prayer to meditate with:***

Be at peace. Do not look forward in fear to the changes of life; rather look to them with full hope as they arise. God, whose very own you are, will deliver you from out of them. He has kept you hitherto, and He will lead you safely through all things; and when you cannot stand it, God will bury you in his arms. Do not fear what may happen tomorrow; the same everlasting Father who cares for you today will take care of you then and every day. He will either shield you from suffering, or give you unfailing strength to bear it. Be at peace, and put aside all anxious thoughts and imagination.

* St. Francis de Sales (1567-1622)