

Growing in FAITH

Discovering **hope** and **joy** in the Catholic faith.

February 2026

Church of the Incarnation, Mantua, NJ

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One Minute Meditations

St. Onesimus

Born in Phrygia, St. Onesimus was enslaved to Philemon of Colossae in present-day Turkey. He encountered St. Paul during the apostle's imprisonment in Rome, where Onesimus had fled after stealing from his master. Moved by Paul's witness, he repented, was baptized, and later gained his freedom. Onesimus became a trusted companion and co-worker of St. Paul and was eventually martyred for the faith during the persecutions under Emperor Domitian.

God's Valentine to us

If God sent a Valentine, it might sound something like this: "*My darling child*" (Jeremiah 31:20), "*You are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you*" (Isaiah 43:4). "*As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love*" (John 15:9). "*Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends...*" (John 15:13-14). "*Do you love me?*" (John 21:16) That makes the Bible the world's longest love letter.

"God is not the enemy of our freedom but its ground. That is something we ought to relearn in these days. Only love that is almighty can ground a joy that is free from anxiety." Pope Benedict XVI

Have you ever felt restless or quietly dissatisfied, sensing that something in your life needs changing? Lent offers that opportunity. It is a spiritual reset, inviting us to reorient our hearts toward Christ, the true source of peace, joy, purpose, and meaning. Here are practical ways to deepen your encounter with God and His love this Lent.

Faith is relational, not informational. The first disciples were not content with simply hearing about Jesus. They wanted to be with Him and to know Him personally. Christ extends that same invitation to us today. We respond by making room for Him through prayer and meditation, regular participation in Mass, and time with Scripture, not as duties to complete, but as ways of choosing a living relationship with the One who loves us most.

Choose trust over control. "Let Him lead and guide you," Pope Leo has urged. God's invitation to deeper friendship is renewed each day, and Lent is a privileged time to respond with intention. Begin each morning by

offering your day to God, placing your work, relationships, and uncertainties in His hands. This simple act of trust opens the door to genuine freedom.

Share what you have received. A true encounter with God naturally leads to what Pope Leo called “missionary

"If you sense the Lord calling you, do not be afraid...He alone knows the deepest, perhaps hidden, longings of your heart — the path that will lead you to true fulfillment." (Pope Leo XIV)

zeal," the desire to share with others what we have received. After meeting Christ, St. Andrew simply brought his brother, Simon Peter, to Him. Likewise, sharing your faith is often as simple as an honest conversation with a friend about the source of your hope. You are not persuading or performing; you are inviting someone you care about to meet the Friend who has changed your life.

This Lent, let renewal take root.
Choose presence, trust, and generosity,
and allow God to do the rest.

Why Do Catholics Do That

Why do Catholics give up meat on Fridays in Lent?

Abstaining from meat on Fridays in Lent is not merely a rule, but a reverent sacrifice rooted in remembrance of Christ's sacrifice on Good Friday. By giving up something we enjoy but do not need, we unite a small, bodily sacrifice to His offering on the Cross.

This “prayer of the body” strengthens the prayer of the soul, training our hearts in discipline and gratitude. It keeps our focus on Christ and serves as a quiet, outward sign of faith. For the same reasons, the Church encourages Friday penance throughout the year.

When things go wrong, choose charity

When difficulties arise, our instinct is often to complain, assign blame, or turn inward with harsh self-criticism. These reactions rarely solve the problem. More often, they weaken charity, cloud judgment, and strain relationships. A more constructive response is to choose kindness deliberately, in thought, speech, and action.

Practice kindness in thought: When self-pity, resentment, comparison, or harsh self-judgment appear, treat them as temptations rather than truths. Pause and redirect your thinking. Replace them with a steady reminder such as, "This is difficult, but I can respond well." Offer yourself the same patience you would give a friend.

Practice kindness in speech: Before speaking, ask whether

your words will help or simply vent frustration. If you would not say something to or about someone you love, refrain. When emotions run high, bring your complaints to prayer first. Naming them before God can bring clarity and restraint.

Practice kindness in action: Focus on what you can do rather than what you cannot control. Choose one concrete act of goodwill: express gratitude, offer help, listen attentively, or perform a small, unnoticed kindness. These simple actions restore perspective and soften difficult moments.

Responding with kindness does not ignore problems. It creates the conditions for peace, clearer judgment, and constructive action to take root.

from Scripture

Matthew 4:1-11, He chose us

In this passage, Jesus is tempted by the Devil. First, Satan tempted Jesus to satisfy His hunger with a miracle – to put physical needs above spiritual needs. Jesus showed us that spiritual needs come first, and to entrust both to God's care. Next, Satan commanded Jesus to jump from the temple roof, forcing God's hand. Again, Jesus refused: serving God means doing things God's way.

Finally, Satan offered to surrender all the kingdoms of the world if Jesus would worship him. While horrible, it

promised a "painless" way to save the world. Jesus rejected it, choosing the Cross because it was the only way to save us. He chose us. When tempted to do what's "easy" versus what's morally right, ask for the strength to choose what's right.

The season of Lent is a powerful opportunity for spiritual renewal and growth in love. We can take comfort knowing Jesus faced the same temptations we do and conquered them. If we stay close to Jesus, He will lead us to victory.

Q & A

What to do with dryness in prayer

God never leaves us, yet our experience of prayer can ebb and flow. There are times of joy and peace, and others marked by dryness and difficulty. While dry seasons can be discouraging, that is often when our faith can grow the most. Don't avoid them, but live them well.

Ask why. Dryness in prayer can point to areas that need attention. Chronic stress, lack of rest, constant busyness, excessive screen time, or unresolved sin can weaken our attentiveness to God. Examine your habits and ask what may be interfering with prayer.

Remember the good times. When times are tough, memory sustains love. Follow Mary's example, who *"kept all these things, pondering them in her heart"* (Luke 2:19). Recall the ways God has acted in your life. Remembering His faithfulness restores confidence.

Renew your "yes" daily. Mary's consent to God's will was a daily surrender, even amid suffering. Resist the temptation to abandon prayer. Each day, echo her words: *"Let it be done unto me according to your word"* (Luke 1:38).

Feasts & Celebrations

February 5 – St. Agatha (c.251). Born to a noble Sicilian family, St. Agatha dedicated herself to God at the age of fifteen. The governor Quintianus was determined to marry her and threatened her if she refused him. She kept her vow despite torture, and imprisonment. God sent her a vision of St. Peter to comfort her, heal her, and fill her dungeon with heavenly light.

February 18 – Ash Wednesday. The first day of Lent. The ashes of old palms are placed on the forehead in the shape of a Cross, as a sign of penance. It's

also a day of abstinence from meat and fasting – one regular meal and two small meals that together don't equal a full meal.

February 22 – St. Margaret of Cortona (1297). St. Margaret's conversion came after the sudden death of the man she was having an affair with. Shaken, she repented and became a Franciscan tertiary. She founded a hospital and an order of Tertiary sisters — *le Poverelle* — to operate it.

February 22 – The Chair of St. Peter. Today marks St. Peter's establishment of the Holy See, the "seat" of authority, in Rome. We thank God for His Church and pray for its holy preservation.

Our Mission

To provide practical ideas that promote faithful Catholic living.

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