

## **March Lesson: Embracing the Cross with Christ**

**Theme:** Lent, redemptive suffering, simplicity, trust, and Franciscan joy

**Key Question:** *Where is Christ inviting me to deeper trust in this season of conversion and mercy?*

### **1. Opening Prayer**

*Lord Jesus, as we enter more deeply into this Lenten season, grant us the grace to walk with You on the way of the Cross. Teach us the meaning of redemptive love, the humility of simplicity, the beauty of trust, and the quiet joy that comes from knowing we belong to You. Open our hearts to the places You are calling us to surrender. Amen.*

### **2. Introduction: The Heart of Lent**

Lent is not a season of spiritual self-improvement, but of **union with Christ**.

It is an invitation to:

- Return to God with humility
- Trust His mercy more deeply
- Allow Him to transform our hearts
- Join our sufferings, sacrifices, and limitations to His redeeming love

The Church calls this *conversion*, not as a one-time event, but as a lifelong journey of being shaped by Christ.

### **3. Teaching: Embracing the Cross With Christ**

#### **A. Redemptive Suffering : Small Sacrifices With Great Love**

Redemptive suffering does not mean seeking pain. It means recognizing that **our daily difficulties have meaning when united to Christ**.

Examples of small, daily sacrifices:

- Choosing patience instead of frustration
- Offering up inconvenience for someone who struggles

- Fasting from comfort or distraction
- Accepting our weaknesses with humility

**Key truth:** Love transforms sacrifice into grace.

*“If we have died with Christ, we shall also live with Him.” — 2 Timothy 2:11*

## **B. Poverty, Humility, and Trust : The Franciscan Path**

St. Francis teaches that true freedom comes from **living simply and depending on God.**

Poverty:

- Not destitution, but uncluttering the heart
- Choosing simplicity over excess

Humility:

- Accepting that we are not self-sufficient
- Seeing ourselves truthfully: loved, limited, and dependent on grace

Trust:

- Letting God be God
- Releasing control
- Believing He provides, even in hardship

**Invitation:** Where do I resist depending on God?

## **C. Prayer, Fasting, and Simplicity :The Shape of Conversion**

These Lenten disciplines free space for God’s voice:

**Prayer** — deepens intimacy

**Fasting** — breaks attachments

**Simplicity** — creates clarity

A suggested Lenten practice:

- Choose one small discipline in each category

- Offer it each day for someone specific
- Rejoice quietly in the hiddenness of the offering

#### **D. Franciscan Joy Amid Hardship: Gladness Rooted in Love**

Franciscan joy is not emotion, it is **quiet gladness in belonging to God**, even during trial.

It grows from:

- Gratitude in small things
- Awareness of God's nearness
- Loving others generously
- Surrendering outcomes

This joy doesn't deny hardship; it shines *through* it.

#### **4. Scripture Reflection (10 minutes)**

Choose one passage:

- **Luke 9:23–24** — “Take up your cross daily.”
- **Matthew 6:1–18** — Prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.
- **Romans 5:1–5** — Suffering produces hope.
- **Philippians 4:4–7** — Joy and trust in the Lord.

#### **Reflection questions:**

1. Which word or phrase stands out to me?
2. What cross is Christ helping me carry right now?
3. How is He inviting me to trust more deeply?

Invite silence, journaling, or shared discussion.

#### **5. Guided Discussion (10–15 minutes)**

Use any of these prompts:

- What does “redemptive suffering” mean in your own life?
- Which daily sacrifices are you being invited to offer with love?
- Where are you resisting simplicity or dependence on God?

- What does Franciscan joy look like for you in a difficult moment?
- **Where is Christ inviting you to deeper trust in this season of conversion and mercy?**

## **6. Invitation to Action (Choose One for the Week)**

- **Practice a small, hidden sacrifice** each day for someone in need
- **Commit to a simple daily prayer**, even just 5 minutes
- **Fast from one comfort** that distracts you from God
- **Do an act of mercy** without seeking recognition
- **Notice one moment of joy** each day and thank God for it

Encourage them to choose what fits their capacity not perfection, but faithfulness.

## **7. Closing Prayer**

*Jesus, gentle companion of the suffering and humble Lord of our hearts, teach us this Lent to walk with You. Take our small sacrifices and make them instruments of healing. Help us trust You more deeply and find joy in the freedom of loving You. Stay with us on the path of conversion and lead us into Your peace. Amen.*