

**St. Edward's Catholic Church
Some Suggestions for Lenten Prayer**

Getting in Touch with God's Love

Praying with the Seven Sorrows of Mary

Praying with the Sorrowful Mysteries

Praying with the Stations of the Cross

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***Note:* Podcasts of talks on the subject of some of this prayer material can be found on my blog, *Creo en Dios!*, which you can find at <http://susanjoan.wordpress.com>. (Go to the "Podcast" page on top of the home page to find the links.)**

Getting in Touch with God's Love

Day 1

Hosea 2:16-25

"I will allure you: I will lead you into the desert and speak to your heart."

Enter into God's heart as God speaks these words to you? What feelings do I sense in God?

How do I feel about God's desire to lead me into the desert of this retreat to speak to my heart?

"I will espouse you to me forever; I will espouse you in right and justice, in love and mercy; I will espouse you in fidelity, and you shall know your God."

Contemplate God's invitation for a spousal relationship. How do I feel about such an intimate relationship with God? Do I believe such intimacy with God is possible?

Knowledge of God in the Jewish Scriptures means a heartfelt, intimate knowledge of God. In what ways do I desire to come to know God more deeply and experientially?

Days 2 and 3

Psalm 139

*"Behind and before you encircle me and rest your hand upon me."
"If I ascend to the heavens, ...if I lie down in Sheol, ...if I fly with the wings of dawn, ...event there your hand will guide me."*

Listen to God speak these words to you. What does God's presence feel like?

What is it like to know that no matter where you go, God is there? That you can neither flee from God or become lost from God?

*"You formed my inmost being; you knew me in my mother's womb."
"Your eyes foresaw my actions."*

God loved us before we were born. Before we were born, God saw all we would do and be and loved us.

What does it mean to you to be so held and precious to God?

Day 4

John 1:35-39

Contemplate the passage, seeing, listening and entering into the event as if it is happening now in your life and experience.

“Look! There is the Lamb of God!”

John the Baptist looked many times at Jesus as they were growing up. How did he feel about Jesus?

At this moment, John saw Jesus as the “Lamb of God.” As I look at Jesus now, who is Jesus or God for me? A friend? A brother? A Parent? My beloved? My Savior?

“Jesus turned around and noticed them...”

As Jesus looks at me, how does he see me? How does he feel about me?

“What are you looking for?”

Jesus asks me about my desires and hopes. What do I desire from God now? (Share that desire with Jesus.) What does Jesus desire for me? (Let Jesus share that desire with you.)

“Where do you stay?”

Home is the place we find out most about a person. The disciples desired to get to know Jesus, to spend time with him in his home. How do I feel about getting to know Jesus so intimately that I spend time with him in his home? (Share with Jesus your feelings and be attentive to his response.)

“Come and see,” he answered...and “they stayed with him that day.”

Jesus invites me into his home, his dwelling place. What is his home like? (See, touch, smell, imagine what it is like.)

I spend the whole day with Jesus. We relax. I talk over any concerns that are on my mind. I bring out into the open areas in which I feel stuck or unfree. I express my hopes, and desires for our relationship. He listens, responds, shares his desires and feelings with me.

At times, we just sit quietly together. How do I feel being with Jesus? How does Jesus feel about being with me? What are his hopes and desires for our relationship? (Share your feelings and listen.)

Days 5 and 6

God's Presence in my Life History

We know by faith that we can find God present in all things. He is present in all the events and dimensions of my life. But has the awareness of his presence throughout my life really taken hold of me? This exercise is a help to discover the presence of the Father, Son and Spirit in the events of my own life, past and present. Memory is the sacrament of God's presence.

The material over which I shall pray is the "stuff" of my own personal history – the events, the experiences, the people who have crossed my path, the jobs I have held, the gifts I have been given, my accomplishments, my failures. By placing myself in the presence of the Lord I go with Him down "memory lane" and contemplate the events of my own personal history seeking how the Father, Son and Spirit have been involved in my life.

The grace we are praying for here is a deep heartfelt appreciation of how the Lord has been present in my Life.

I begin by remembering. This remembering is an awareness of the exterior events in my life and my interior reactions to them. I notice events in my life story in terms of my family background, childhood, school years, work years, my years of living out my vocation, etc. I remember the different persons, places, situations of the different times I am remembering. My memory makes them present to me.

I remember events that give meaning to me (both pleasure and pain) or those I still can't find meaning for but that I am still searching out. Some key experiences that have been traumatic my remain hidden, but I will be aware of something because of some other events recalled. Let one memory touch off another by association. This may be neither logical nor chronological.

As I recall, I try to notice all the gifts that I have received. I notice where and God has been present in the events of my life revealed to me by God.

From time to time throughout my prayer I speak to God in appreciation, wonder, anticipation. I talk to God about my feelings as I was present to the memory. I ask God what God's experience of it is. I notice how God looks at me, how God is with me.

Day 7

Isaiah 43:1-7

Listen to God's promise in Isaiah. Hear God say those words to you.

Praying with the Seven Sorrows of Mary

Day 1

The First Sorrow: The Prophecy of Simeon **(Luke 2:27-35)**

Reflect upon some of your past Simeon moments.

How did you find yourself responding when you receive difficult news?

What is your initial response? (anger, disbelief, sadness, silence, blaming...?)

What have you found most helpful when you have received difficult news?

How has your relationship with God influenced how you have experienced your Simeon moment?

If Mary were sitting with you now, what would you want to say to her or ask her about this first sorrow in her life?

Day 2

The Second Sorrow: The Flight Into Egypt **(Matthew 2:13-15)**

Reflect upon a Herod moment in your life.

What was most difficult about being forced to “flee” in order to be safe from harm?

What is most helpful spiritually when you are in a situation that requires a difficult moving on?

How has your relationship with God influenced how you have experienced leaving something or someone harmful?

If Mary were sitting with you now, what would you want to say to her or ask her about this second sorrow in her life?

Day 3
The Third Sorrow: The Loss of Jesus in the Temple
(Luke 2:43-51)

Reflect upon an experience in your life when you have lost someone or something of great value.

What was it like? What kinds of thoughts and feelings did you have? How responsible did you feel?

What was the most difficult part of losing someone or something of great value?

What is most needed or most helpful for you when searching for a lost treasure?

How has your relationship with God influenced how you have searched for the missing parts of your life?

If Mary were sitting with you now, what would you want to say to her or ask her about this third sorrow in her life?

Day 4
The Fourth Sorrow: Mary Meets Jesus Carrying His Cross
(Luke 23:27)

Think of a life experience when you met your own pain.

How did you meet this pain?

What was the most difficult for you in meeting your own pain?

Did meeting your own pain eventually help you in some way?

How has your relationship with God influenced how you meet suffering in yourself and others?

If Mary were sitting with you now, what would you want to say to her or ask her about this fourth sorrow in her life?

Day 5
The Fifth Sorrow: Mary Stands Beneath the Cross
(John 19:25-27)

When have you stood beneath the cross of another? What was this person's suffering like?

Was anyone else there beneath the cross with you?

What was most difficult for you when you stood beneath the cross?

Where did you find your inner courage and strength?

How has your relationship with God influenced how you have experienced standing beneath the cross?

If Mary were sitting with you now, what would you want to say to her or ask her about this fifth sorrow in her life?

Day 6
The Sixth Sorrow: Mary Receives the Dead Body of Jesus
(John 19:38)

Reflect on a time when you held the suffering of another in your lap.

What do you find most challenging about receiving the suffering of another?

What do you find most rewarding about receiving the suffering of another?

As you reflect upon the spaciousness of your lap of love and your current situation, how much room do you have for the suffering of others?

How has your relationship with God influenced how you have been a living Pieta for others?

If Mary were sitting with you now, what would you want to say to her or ask her about this sixth sorrow in her life?

Day 7
The Seventh Sorrow: Jesus is Laid in the Tomb
(John 19:39-42)

Call to mind one of your “tomb times” (significant endings and farewells).

What have you had to let go because of your tomb time?

How has this experience shaped or influenced your future?

How has your relationship with God affected how you have gone through this tomb time?

When you have been hurting in the past, where have you found hope?

If Mary were sitting with you now, what would you want to say to her or ask her about this seventh sorrow in her life?

Praying With The Sorrowful Mysteries

Day 1 Agony in the Garden

Matthew 26: 36-46

Read Matthew's description of the Agony in the Garden. Enter into the events, allowing yourself to be there, walking with Jesus in the Garden. Ask Jesus to let you stay with him when he leaves the other disciples to go off by himself. Go with Him and listen to His prayer to His Father. Be with Him as He comes to the decision to go through with God's plan rather than retreating into His divine nature. Share with Jesus your feelings about what you have witnessed and allow Jesus to share with you whatever He wishes to reveal.

After you have sat with the passage for some time, consider these words of Ronald Rolheiser:

Jesus walked into the Garden of Gethsemane as one tempted, just as we are, towards bitterness, fear, resentment, and self-protection. He was haunted by all the same proclivities that beset us. But, in Gethsemane, he transformed rather than transmitted those temptations. He didn't simply give back in kind, letting the energy simply flow through him. He purified the energy and took the tension and sin out of it by absorbing them. It cost him his blood, his life, and his reputation. He had to sweat blood, but he emerged from the Garden the truly generative lover who, at the price of giving away everything, gives back peace for tension and forgiveness for sin, absorbing in his own person the tension and sin so as to take them out of the community. The giving over of that kind of blood really does wash away sin. And, in doing this, Jesus doesn't want admirers, but followers. The Garden of Gethsemane invites us, everyone of us, to step in, and to step up. It invites us to sweat a lover's blood so as to help absorb, purify, and transform tension and sin rather than simply transmit them."

What lessons do we learn from the Agony in the Garden? What does Jesus behavior teach us about how to respond to the dark gardens in our lives? Am I as willing to undergo suffering as was Jesus?

When have I been like the disciples, unable to stay awake with Jesus? Can it be said of me that though the spirit is willing the flesh is weak?

Day 2

Scouring at the Pillar

John 19:1

Talking about this Mystery, John Chittister calls Jesus a “model of a passion that never dies. She writes:

The Scouring of the Pillar is not about blind abuse, though certainly there is plenty of that in the actions of the state that inflicts it. The Scouring at the Pillar is about not giving up when there is no apparent reason to go on. The synagogue that Jesus came to perfect has turned against him. The state whom Jesus has honored fails to defend him. The people whom Jesus has served abandon him and the disciples whom Jesus has loved deny him. There is nothing left of the dream and the determination. But Jesus goes on. He does not change his mind. He does not give in. He does not quit. He simply, silently, and stolidly persists, despite the abuse, despite the abandonment, despite the death of the dream.

How have you felt when you’ve had the experience of someone letting you down? When someone you trust betrays that trust? How do you feel?

Consider what Jesus must have been going through as he was being scourged. Feeling completely abandoned by his friends. Yet he persists.

How can Jesus’ model help you in times of abuse and abandonment? What do you need to hear from Jesus to help you in such times?

Day 3

The Crowning with Thorns

Matthew 27:28-29a

After the scourging, a crown of thorns is placed on Jesus head. Allow yourself to imagine the pain that Jesus must have experienced as it was placed on this head and tightened, the thorns turned inward to as to pierce his head. Imagine the pain...and the feeling of blood flowing from Jesus’ head into His eyes and ears.

All through the mocking, Jesus makes no reply.

How easy is it for you to follow Jesus’ example?

To endure pain with no complaint?

To listen to unfair accusations and criticisms and make no reply?

What do you want to say to Jesus as you watch him experience his suffering?

What do you need to hear Jesus say to you?

Day 4
The Carrying of the Cross

John 19:17

Be with Jesus carrying his cross. Let him share with you what is happening to him. And share with Jesus what you need to share with him.

Day 5
Crucifixion

John 19: 16-19, 23-30

Read the scripture passage from John. Watch how Jesus suffered as a human. A healthy man in the prime of His life, He is betrayed, imprisoned, tortured, falsely condemned, and executed. Consider: What did Jesus go through in his mind and heart when he was treated this way? What angers and resentments tested him? What bitterness? How did Jesus handle all this? As you contemplate the suffering He endured, remember that Jesus freely chose to go through all these dark agonies – for you.

St. Ignatius encourages us to imagine Christ suspended on the cross before you, and converse with him in a colloquy: How is it that he, although he is the Creator, has come to make himself a human being? How is it that he has passed from eternal life to death here in time, and to die in this way for my sins? In a similar way, reflect on yourself and ask:

- What have I done for Christ?
How have I let myself think I am more than I am? When have I forgotten to love you?
- What am I doing for Christ?
How have I let myself think I am less than I am? When have I forgotten that you love me?
- What ought I do for Christ?
How am I arrogant and individualistic? When have I followed my plans for you and evaded your invitations to me?

Day 6

What Does it Mean?

When Saint Francis of Assisi knelt before the crucifix in the church of San Damiano, he saw a cross with the figure of a youthful, vibrant, alert Jesus, surrounded by his disciples. Later generations showed him dead and lifeless, as if conquered by the cross. How do I see Jesus when I contemplate the cross?

What difference will my contemplation of the Sorrowful Mysteries, and the Crucifixion in particular, make in my life? What have I learned from Christ's suffering and death that will strengthen me both in accepting my own suffering and in living my life as Christ's disciple?

Reflect on theologian Michael Himes' response to the question of how does God permit the suffering of the world:

The answer is that God does not will or permit it. God hates human suffering. God will not tolerate the pain of God's creatures. Then, given the terrible reality of suffering in the world, where is God to be found? God suffers with us. God does not permit the cross, God is on the cross. By dying, God overcomes death. By suffering God defeats suffering. That is the point of the Christian claim about the death and rising of the Lord... God is here suffering with human beings.

What do these words mean to you?

Day 7

Repetition

Repetition is a repeating of a prayer experience in order to allow for deeper appropriation of the particular mystery. It is not repeating the material in sense of going back and looking for something new. Instead you want to return to the points where you experienced the greatest movement in order to allow yourself to savor, deepen and better appreciate the experience, to allow it to be reinforced.

So on this last day, simply return to the moment in one of your prior prayer periods this week where you felt the greatest movement toward or away from God. The place of deepest affect. Go back there and see what else God wants to share with you.

Praying With the Stations of the Cross

Day 1

Jesus is Condemned to Death

Luke 23:13-25

Standing With the Executioners?

Pilate is the paradigm of those who fail to take responsibility for their actions or inactions. Rev. Emmanuel Charles McCarthy writes, "Over the centuries many who have claimed to be followers of Jesus have stood with the historical 'community of executioners' – kings, presidents, governors, judges, soldiers, police, wardens, hangmen." Where have I stood with those who condemn others? Where have I washed my hands of my responsibility to fight injustice?

Dealing with Authority

Jesus bowed to the rule of Pilate, recognizing that it was the will of His Father. How difficult is it for me to bend to authority? Are there times it is hard for me to bend to God's (direct or indirect) authority?

Dealing with False Accusations

Have I forgiven anyone who has falsely accused me of something? Do I need to be forgiven for any false accusations I've made, even though they were only in my mind?*

Day 2

Jesus Takes Up His Cross

Mark 15:20

How We See and Respond to Our Crosses

Jesus bore an enormous cross. In our eyes, the crosses we bear often seem to us to be equally enormous. How accurately do I evaluate the size of my own crosses? How does that affect how I deal with them?

In a slightly different vein: How willing am I to carry Christ's cross – the cross of nonviolent love...the cross of love unto death?

Our Crosses vs. the Crosses of Others

Whose pardon should I seek for complaining when things were tough? Whose real problems did I reduce to unimportant by the way I did or did not respond?*

Day 3
Jesus Falls for the First Time

Accepting Human Frailty

In the Incarnation, God becomes a human, becoming like us in all things except Sin, as we are told in scripture. That includes taking on human frailties. How good am I at willingly accepting my weaknesses?

Obstacles to Discipleship

What are the things that trip me up along the path of discipleship? The things that make me fall along the way? What things tempt me to give up, to stay down, to change direction?

Taking Responsibility and Giving Understanding

When was the last time I tried to blame someone else for my mistakes? Have I withheld understanding for someone else's shortcomings?*

Day 4
Jesus Meets his Mother

Sharing Suffering

Part of love is standing with the suffering of those we love and letting others be with us on our own suffering. How willing am I to simply be with another in his suffering? How willing am I to let another stand with me in my suffering?

Relationships with Parents

How much have I pretended not to see and meet my parent's needs? Have I forgiven my parents for not being 'perfect'?*

Relationship and Discipleship

Are there times when I feel that my family is a hindrance to my discipleship? Are there things I refrain from out of a sense they would not be fair to my family? How do I deal with that with God?

Day 5
Simon of Cyrene Carries the Cross

Luke 3:26

Being Simon

Do I realize that I am Simon to Christ each time I come to the aid of another in need? Do I help carry the cross of others willingly or resentfully? Do I do so without any expectation of reciprocation?

Accepting Help from Others

Do I allow others to come to my aid? Or does pride lead me to refuse to accept the assistance of others?

Day 6
Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus

Intimate Caring

Whose face should I have gently touched, but didn't out of fear of intimacy?*

Gratitude

Have I ever thanked all the 'Veronicas' in my life?*

Imprinted Image

What image do I imprint on the consciousness of others? What impression do I leave on the fabric of their lives?

Day 7
Jesus Falls for the Second Time

Giving up on Ourselves

Sometimes it seems like we can't go on, when all of our efforts seem to fail. Are there times I've given up too easily? Times when I've lacked perseverance?

Giving Up on Others

Is there anyone to whom I should now or should have given a second chance?

Picking up the Fallen Cross

Sometimes, temporarily laying down our burdens gives us a chance to look at them afresh. When I fall and examine the reasons for my fall, can I see my burdens in a new light? Might some of my falls be moments of dying to self, such that my getting up begins a process of rising in Christ?

Day 8

Jesus Meets the Daughters of Jerusalem

Luke 23:27-31

Responding to Other's Sorrow

How do I respond when people seek to solace me? What is my response to their sorrow at my pain?

The women who Jesus met on the road must have had doubts as they saw him. How do I respond when tragedy, horror and desolation cause others to weaken in their faith?

The Women

How many women are there in my life whom I have taken for granted? How do I treat women in general? Be specific.*

Day 9

Jesus Falls for the Third Time

Getting Up Again

Are there areas where I am completely drained of strength? Are there addictions in my life, which I no longer try to conquer?* Are there things I've just given up on? Do I at times give in to despair?

Helping Others Time After Time

Is there anyone on whom I have just "given up"?*

Day 10

Jesus is Stripped of His Garments

Being Stripped

Part of the spiritual journey involves the stripping away of our false images of ourselves and of others. The tearing away of all that covers our true nature. How to I respond to being stripped of those things that have become part of my self-identity?

In a different vein, are there things I cling to? Things I cannot freely let go of?

The Appearance of Others

Do I resent the way my spouse/parents/children look now? Can I see them without their “garments”?

Day 11

Jesus is Nailed to the Cross

Luke 23:33, 47

Willingly Paying the Price

Do I reflect on how much Jesus was willing to pay for my sake? How much suffering he was willing to endure? Am I willing to look at that sacrifice long enough for it to have some impact on me – for it to affect my own willingness to pay a high price it can take to live a life of true discipleship?

Kicking Someone When They are Down

Have I ever “added insult to injury” – kicked someone when they were down? Have I forgiven those who have caused me pain—deliberate or not?*

Day 12

Jesus Dies on the Cross

Luke 23:44-46

Honoring Those Who Risk All for Their Faith

Do I pay attention to those in the world who put themselves in danger, who risk their lives for their faith? Who will spare nothing to live in accordance with the Gospel?

Being With Someone to the End

Have I put off seeing a sick person until it was too late? What, if anything, can I do about it now? Are there people who weren't there when someone I loved was dying? How do I view them now?*

Day 13
Jesus' Body is Removed from the Cross

Despair or Hope?

Rev. Emmanuel Charles McCarthy writes “viewing the mutilated body of the beloved is the most grief-ridden experience of human existence. It is incontrovertible evidence that evil rules...that in the end it is not the gentle, the nonviolent and the meek who inherit the earth but the cruel, violent and the tough. Do I give in to despair in the face of death and what McCarthy calls “the dark side of reality”? Or do I believe, no matter what, that something follows death.

Allowing Time for Grief

Are there people who simply don't understand my need to grieve? Who are the people in my life who need time, space/understanding as they grieve a loss?*

Day 14
Jesus is Laid in the Tomb

Luke 23:50-54

Burial Shroud image

Living Through the Dark Night

How do I respond when I cannot feel the presence of God? What helps me get through the dark nights of the soul?

Burying Sins

In burying my past sins—have I let go — have I forgiven me? Have I truly “let bygone be bygone” by forgiving others – by trusting in God's mercy?*

Note: Some questions for reflection on the stations were adapted from a 2009 Parish Mission at St. Michael the Archangel parish in Findlay, Ohio (The ones labeled with the number and title of the Station.)