



GSR in the Classroom: LENT

# LESSON – FRESH APPROACH COULD BRING US NEARER TO GOD

## BEFORE YOU READ:

It's common for Catholics and other Christians to take on a special discipline during Lent. For some people, that means giving up a favorite food or pastime, or even a sinful habit. Others may choose to be more prayerful, forgiving or charitable. Alone or with a partner, discuss:

- What sacrifice or practice are you considering as Lent begins?
- In what ways do you hope this effort will bring you closer to Jesus?

## Keep in mind while you read:

It's often said, at Christmas and other times, that it's better to give than it is to receive. St. Francis reminds us, in prayer, that it is in giving that we receive. Consider how you can stretch yourself this Lent, and how you might benefit from your extra effort.



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## WHAT I'M GETTING FOR LENT

BY CHRISTIN [TOMY](#)

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Lent is about to start, and I'm thinking about what I'll be getting this year.

Yes, I know I sound more like a child on Christmas Eve than an adult preparing for a season of repentance and conversion. And while conventional wisdom tells me I should be choosing what I'll give up, I'm not. This Lent, here is what I'm getting and how I hope it'll help me encounter God.

## THIS LENT, I'M GETTING QUIET

The Lenten call I'm feeling most deeply this year is the invitation to

enter the quiet. While the gifts I receive from the quiet are **manifold**, two in particular are on my heart this year: rest and listening.

In a world full of needs to be met, rest can seem **superfluous**, lazy or even selfish. However, when we let ourselves get quiet — deep soul-quiet — we're invited into a holy rest. This kind of rest is, paradoxically, an antidote to the selfishness and laziness that threaten to numb our hearts to the cries of the other. After all, it is Jesus himself who offers us this rest, just as he invited his disciples: "Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while" (Mark 6:32). In this rest, I'm invited to surrender my need to be successful, useful and busy.

I remember reading once that busyness is really a form of **existential** laziness. When I'm honest with myself, I recognize that this is true. Sometimes being busy allows me to feel important and engaged, while ignoring the small inner voice of the Spirit. Busyness tempts me to react rather than respond. It allows me to do *something*, but not necessarily to do the right thing, or courageous thing, or the well-discerned thing. It's only when I drop the defense of busyness (even the kind of busyness that **purports** to be about helping others) that I can truly rest in God and begin to listen. "Our hearts are restless," writes St. Augustine, "until they rest in God."

I have no illusions that I will be any less occupied this Lent. I won't give up my commitments and move into the desert, but I will try to take small steps to shift my attitude, to move from self-centered busyness to other-centered purposefulness. Getting quiet is the first of those steps.

### THIS LENT, I'M GETTING OUTSIDE

Of course, getting quiet won't do me any good if I am living in a cocoon. In his [2017 Lenten message](#), Pope Francis urges us to "favor the culture of encounter in our one human family." If my Lent is going to be about more than a few cozy me-and-God moments, if it's going to invite me further into this culture of encounter, then I have to get outside: outside my own head, outside my biases, outside my comfort zone.

This requires me to move. I'm part of a community that names **itinerancy** as a part of our charism; St. Dominic was an itinerant preacher who traveled wherever he was called in order to bring the Good

## VOCABULARY

**manifold:** many and various

**superfluous:** unnecessary

**existential:** connected to our sense of being

**purport:** appearing or claiming to be or do something, perhaps falsely

**itinerancy:** traveling from place to place to conduct business or ministry

**nuanced:** characterized by subtle shades of meaning

News. In our times and in my own life, I believe the call of itinerancy is more **nuanced**. We are called not just to move, but to *be moved* — to let ourselves encounter God in others and in unexpected places, and to let it change us.

As [Sirach 1:9-10](#) reminds us, God has "poured forth [wisdom] upon all his works / upon every living thing." If I am going to encounter God's wisdom in other living beings, I first have to put myself in a position to encounter them. For me, this includes: truly seeking to know my neighbors, spending time in the natural world, and getting off Facebook and into real conversations.

### THIS LENT, I'M GETTING LOST

If I'm *really* getting outside my comfort zone, I'm bound to get a little disoriented. It's only when I push the boundaries of familiarity that I can begin to let go of my prejudices, biases and maybe even some of my beliefs. It can make me feel lost for a little while, and I think that's okay ... perhaps it's even good.

Now, I'm no stranger to being lost. I have a notoriously poor sense of direction, and as a proud owner of a flip phone, I didn't have access to navigation technology until I got a GPS this year. Getting lost is simply a routine part of my existence, and while it would be a stretch to say that I *enjoy* the experience (especially when I'm running late), I must admit that it has taught me a few things.

Getting lost makes me vulnerable, because unless I want to continue aimlessly exploring my surroundings, at some point I have to stop and ask a stranger for directions. I must admit that I don't know the way, and I have to trust that the other person has something to offer me. The gift of getting lost is to release my grip on self-reliant certainty and leave some room for faith.

Opening myself to the wisdom of the other — *especially* the other with whom I vehemently disagree — doesn't mean I become ungrounded or lose all my convictions. My "no" can still mean "no," but my response is more likely to be rooted in authenticity rather than fear.

Perhaps by focusing on this kind of "getting" I'll learn how to give more selflessly. I pray that through these 40 days, I'll let God lead me deeper into encounter and closer to the joy of Easter.



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#### AFTER YOU READ:

Like New Year's resolutions, Lenten disciplines can be hard to maintain. Consider these questions as you explore what might be most effective for you:

- How might this practice take me outside my comfort zone?
- Am I likely to continue this way of living, or will I be eager to return to my old ways after Lent?
- How will this make me a stronger disciple?

**SCRIPTURE SPOTLIGHT:** The Gospel for the First Sunday of Lent reminds us that like Jesus, we must struggle with temptation.

*"At that time Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil.  
He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was hungry.  
The tempter approached and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become loaves of bread.'  
He said in reply, 'It is written:  
One does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes forth from the mouth of God.'"*

*Then the devil took him to the holy city,  
and made him stand on the parapet of the temple,  
and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down.  
For it is written:  
He will command his angels concerning you  
and with their hands they will support you,  
lest you dash your foot against a stone."  
Jesus answered him,  
'Again it is written,  
You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.'*

*Then the devil took him up to a very high mountain,  
and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in their magnificence,  
and he said to him, 'All these I shall give to you,  
if you will prostrate yourself and worship me.'  
At this, Jesus said to him,  
'Get away, Satan!  
It is written:  
The Lord, your God, shall you worship  
and him alone shall you serve.'"*

*Then the devil left him and, behold,  
angels came and ministered to him."*

#### [Matthew 4:1-11](#)

Alone or with a partner, consider the following insights and questions:

- What tempts you and your classmates today (e.g. drug dealers or technology)? How might giving in to these temptations harm you, your friends and others around you?
- Sister Christin Tomy writes, "Busyness tempts me to react rather than respond." How do you resist busyness? Do you react without thinking or do you draw inward and consider consequences before you respond?
- How might listening to God, who dwells in your conscience, equip you to respond better to temptations?



## THE CHURCH'S CALL

Pope Francis shares this reflection on how temptation grows:

*"Jesus himself spoke about this when he told the [parable](#) of the seeds and the weeds. The seeds grew, but the weeds planted by the enemy also grew. This is how temptation grows, it grows and grows. If one does not stop it, then it occupies everything."*

— [Pope Francis, Feb. 18, 2014](#)

Reflection Questions:

1. Pope Francis speaks of the enemies who plant the seeds of temptation. Who are these planters?
2. What type of seeds are they planting?
3. How do they fuel anger, mistrust and fear among families, neighbors, communities and nations?
4. How might you encourage the planters of temptation to work for the common good?

## SYNERGY WITH SISTERS

Sister Christin Tomy, whose article encourages us to spend more time in the natural world, helps people who want to become farmers. She coordinates a collaborative farm on her congregation's land in Wisconsin, where people have access to the soil, tools and know-how they need to develop as farmers and produce healthy food. Learn more [here](#) about the Sinsinawa Mound collaborative farm and watch this [video](#) in which she explains the spiritual roots of the farm.

Discover community gardening opportunities in your area with the help of this [map](#), and consider getting involved in helping people in your area to grow their own food. If there is no community garden nearby, explore with leaders of your parish or school whether land on your campus can be used to help people grow food.

### ACT

1. Join Sister Christin Tomy in her invitation to explore fresh approaches to draw nearer to God. End your day with this video: [The Art of Examen: Prayer](#).
2. Following the practice of Sister Christin Tomy, truly seek to know your neighbors, spend time in the natural world, turn off social media and engage in real conversations with friends, families and even complete strangers.

### PRAY

God of many chances, your mercy never fails me.  
From the instant I awaken, to the moment my day ends in sleep, you remain faithful.  
When I favor the tempter over you, you remain faithful.  
When I use your name in vain, you remain faithful.  
When I refuse to let my true self shine forth, you remain faithful.  
When I badmouth or intimidate others, you remain faithful.  
When I fail to offer the stranger hospitality, you remain faithful.  
When I harm the earth and waste its resources, you remain faithful.  
When I am worn down by the weight of my own struggles and blunders, you remain faithful.  
When I am buried in shame, you remain faithful.  
When I relapse in making bad choices, you remain faithful.  
God of many chances, you are slow to anger and abounding in love.  
Your mercy never fails me.  
Amen.