

**BREAD
AND
WINE**



*Readings
for
Lent
and
Easter*

**REVISED AND
EXPANDED
EDITION**

Arnold ♦ Augustine ♦ Berry ♦ Chesterton ♦ Day ♦ Eckhart
Endō ♦ Hauerwas ♦ Ignatius ♦ Kierkegaard ♦ L'Engle
Lewis ♦ MacDonald ♦ Merton ♦ Nouwen ♦ Rossetti
Sayers ♦ Stein ♦ Thurman ♦ Weil ♦ Wright ♦ and others

Bread and Wine

Readings for Lent and Easter

Revised and Expanded Edition

Plough

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Published by Plough Publishing House
Walden, New York
Robertsbridge, England
Elsmore, Australia
www.plough.com

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First edition 2003. Second edition 2025.
ISBN 978-1-63608-170-0

29 28 27 26 1 2 3 4

Cover Photograph © Mimadeo/Adobe Stock

A catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.
Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Title: Bread and wine : readings for Lent and Easter
Description: Revised and expanded edition. | Walden, New York : Plough,
[2025] | Includes bibliographical references and index. | Summary:
"Ninety-six daily reflections for Lent and Eastertide plumb the depths
of a wealth of Christian traditions"-- Provided by publisher.
Identifiers: LCCN 2025030150 (print) | LCCN 2025030151 (ebook) |
ISBN
9781636081700 hardcover | ISBN 9780874860443 epub
Subjects: LCSH: Lent--Prayers and devotions | Devotional calendars
Classification: LCC BV85 .B663 2025 (print) | LCC BV85 (ebook) |
DDC
242/.34--dc23/eng/20250828
LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2025030150>
LC ebook record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2025030151>

Printed in the USA

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Introduction

DOROTHY SAYERS WRITES that to make the Easter story into something that neither startles, shocks, terrifies, nor excites is “to crucify the Son of God afresh.” Certainly that would have been unthinkable for Jesus’ first followers, who experienced it firsthand: the heady excitement of his entry into Jerusalem, the traitorous cunning of Judas and the guilty recognition of their own cowardice, the terror of his slow suffocation, and finally the disarming wonder of an empty grave and a living body resurrected from the dead.

As for us, his latter-day disciples, few would deny the magnitude or drama of these events. But how many of us embrace their pain and promise? How many of us, even at Easter, give Christ’s death and resurrection any more attention than the weather?

To observe Lent is to strike at the root of such complacency. Lent (literally “springtime”) is a time of

preparation, a time to return to the desert where Jesus spent forty trying days in preparation for his ministry. He allowed himself to be tested, and if we are serious about following him, we will do the same.

First popularized in the fourth century, Lent is traditionally associated with penitence, fasting, almsgiving, and prayer. It is a time for “giving things up” balanced by “giving to” those in need. Yet whatever else it may be, Lent should never be morose—an annual ordeal during which we begrudgingly forgo a handful of pleasures. Instead, we ought to approach Lent as an opportunity, not a requirement. After all, it is meant to be the church’s springtime, a time when, out of the darkness of sin’s winter, a repentant, empowered people emerges. No wonder one liturgy refers to it as “this joyful season.”

Put another way, Lent is the season in which we ought to be surprised by joy. Our self-sacrifices serve no purpose unless, by laying aside this or that desire, we are able to focus on our heart’s deepest longing: unity with Christ. In him—in his suffering and death, his resurrection and triumph—we find our truest joy.

Such joy is costly, however. It arises from the horror of our sin, which crucified Christ. This is why Meister Eckhart points out that those who have the hardest time with Lent are “the good people.” Most of us are

willing to give up a thing or two; we may also admit our need for renewal. But to die with Christ?

Spiritual masters often refer to a kind of “dread,” the nagging sense that we have missed something important and have been somehow untrue—to ourselves, to others, to God. Lent is a good time to confront the source of that feeling. It is a time to let go of excuses for failings and shortcomings; a time to stop hanging on to whatever shreds of goodness we perceive in ourselves; a time to ask God to show us what we really look like. Finally, it is a time to face up to the personal role each of us plays in prolonging Christ’s agony at Golgotha. As Richard John Neuhaus (paraphrasing John Donne) advises, “Send not to know by whom the nails were driven; they were driven by you, by me.” And yet our need for repentance cannot erase the good news that Christ overcame all sin. His resurrection frees us from ourselves. His empty tomb turns our attention away from all that is wrong with us and with the world, and spurs us on to experience the abundant life he promises.

Since the first edition of this book appeared over two decades ago, there has been a revival of interest in the liturgical year across the Christian world. In response, we have changed the order of some readings so pertinent meditations appear during Holy Week, and added twenty-five new daily reflections to accompany the

reader through Pentecost. Those who treasured the first edition will still see many of their favorite readings, and the thematic sections, with their opening poems, still serve as an overall guide.

“Christ must increase, and I must decrease,” John the Baptist declares, and his words resonate through the readings collected in this book. The men and women who wrote them faced the same challenge we do: to discover Christ—the scarred God, the weak and wretched God, the crucified, dying God of blood and despair—amid the alluring gods of our feel-good age. He reveals the appalling strangeness of divine mercy, and the Love from which it springs. Such Love could not stay imprisoned in a cold tomb. Nor need we, if we truly surrender our lives to it.

The Editors

SECTION I

Invitation



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THE BALLAD OF READING GAOL

Oscar Wilde

. . . And thus we rust Life's iron chain

Degraded and alone:

And some men curse, and some men weep,

And some men make no moan:

But God's eternal Laws are kind

And break the heart of stone.

And every human heart that breaks,

In prison-cell or yard,

Is as that broken box that gave

Its treasure to the Lord,

And filled the unclean leper's house

With the scent of costliest nard.

Ah! Happy those whose hearts can break

And peace of pardon win!

How else may man make straight his plan

And cleanse his soul from Sin?

How else but through a broken heart

May Lord Christ enter in?

Not All Right

Tish Harrison Warren

WEARY IS A WEIGHTY WORD. It brings to mind heavy eyelids and aching joints, the worn out faces of those who have borne too much. To be truly weary is a state of both body and soul. The woman's swollen face after she's cried all that she can cry. The burned-out man collapsing on the couch after a brutal day. The couple who has gone round and round, circling the same impasse.

We know the difference between the kind of gratifying tiredness that comes after a good day's work and the burden of weariness, when the hardness of life settles on us thick and leaden. The book of Ecclesiastes names the latter the "weariness of the flesh." It comes with desolation, anxiety, and the deep sigh of despair.

We read a quote from Jesus, when he spoke to a crowd and said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and

burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matt. 11:28–30).

Jesus calls the weary to himself. He does not call the self-sufficient, nor those with the proper religious credentials or perfect lives. He calls those exhausted from toil, from just getting through the day. He calls those burdened with heavy loads, those weighed down by sin and sorrow. It is these, not the confident and successful, to whom Jesus says, “Come to me.”

One Ash Wednesday, I knelt at a rail as Fr. Thomas, my priest, smeared a black cross on each forehead. “Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return,” he intoned, and marked the preteen girl kneeling next to me. Then, I heard her turn to her mom and whisper, “Does my ash look all right?”

Still kneeling, I started to laugh. Because of course it didn’t look all right. She had a large black smudge in the middle of her forehead. There is no way for that to look all right. But I also laughed because I heard my own heart in her question. I know I’m limited. I know I’m dust and returning to dust. I bear vulnerability, weariness, and mortality. I bear sin, selfishness, and struggle. But I still want to, you know, look okay. I want to pretend I am still all right. I have it together.

It's a well-practiced façade. I'm a ten-year-old girl with a big, black smudge on my face hoping to somehow pass as acceptably cool.

The good news of Jesus is not that we get a merit badge for being put together and hope that God ignores our failures. We serve God not only with our strengths, but in our weaknesses.

The ones Jesus calls are the weary ones, the ones who snap at those they love after a long day, the ones who battle addiction, the ones who aren't who they wish they were, the ones who know they are not strong, the ones who wrestle and repent, who fail and fail again. This is the church, these ones through whom Jesus is strong.

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