



A
Different
Kind of Fast

feeding our true
hungers *in* lent

CHRISTINE
VALTERS
PAINTNER



Introduction:

- What do you hunger and long for? Pause and listen for what gives you life and joy — a sense of deep inner peace and meaningfulness.
- Do you have an existing or emerging sense of what habits are keeping you from the rich feast available to you? Gently begin to name the patterns and compulsions which are life-depleting and life-denying.
- What are practices or rituals that deepen you into presence? Are there other resources you can have available as you embark on this journey through the wilderness, knowing there will be moments of challenge ahead?
- Are there times when you've experienced inner stillness amidst outer busyness and times when you've experienced inner distraction amidst physical solitude? What normally are your distractions? What typically centers you?
- Consider your current relationship to the concept of fasting — what are the ways this practice has been weaponized against you? What do you need in order to reclaim fasting as a sacred path leading you towards love, life, and your own worthiness to feast?
- What longed-for-change has echoed through the course of your life and spiritual journey?
- What are ways you can create and consecrate an inner space for your Lenten contemplations? Consider how you will prepare and commit to this practice of retreat.



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Ash Wednesday Week:

Fast from Consuming
Embrace Simplicity

- Have you experienced or discovered a threshold place for yourself where you enter into a symbolic desert of silence, solitude, and/or continuous prayer? Consider the places you feel fully present to God.
- In your own encounters with death, what was Sister Death's presence like for you? What thoughts, feelings, and images arise when you think of coming more intimately into communion with your own mortality? As you begin to deepen your relationship with Sister Death, what begins to reveal itself as most essential?
- What are some ways the outer spaciousness you are cultivating is bringing you inner freedom?
- Both in discerning what distractions to fast from and in creating an altar to center you in your practice (Day 4's invitation), consider how physical space can be an embodiment of your desires. When bringing intention to that space, what is clarified about your longings and desires?
- In your heart's eye, envision God shaping you from the soil of stardust then breathing the radiance of spirit into you. What invitation does this image of loving and tender creation offer you as you continue on your journey of a different kind of fast?



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Week 1:

Fast from Multitasking and Inattention Embrace Full Presence to the Moment

- As tenderly as you can, consider the struggles, issues, and compulsions that are yours to carry. How have you attempted to flee these? What can help you remain present to yourself just as you are?
- As you become conscious of your methods of distraction and begin to make space in your attention for wonder and beauty, what do you behold? What is calling to be embraced?
- When you abstain from external distractions, what are the internal distractions you notice arising within you? Observe how your internal distractions shift as you breathe intentionally (with or without a breath prayer).
- With the words, images, questions, and sensations from this week's practices in mind, how have those experiences continued to shimmer for you as you go about your day-to-day life? What has the process of these practices revealed to you?
- In your journey to cultivate presence and focus in the midst of distraction, which areas need support and guidance? What are resources you can gift yourself? Who can you reach out to for external support?
- Returning again and again to presence and to the act of releasing our need for distraction requires not only a beginner's mind but also endurance; ask for the Holy One's sustaining power in this journey, and consider how the gifts may already be revealing themselves to you.



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Week 2:

Fast from Scarcity Anxiety Embrace Radical Trust in Abundance

- What is your initial response to this invitation to embrace radical trust? What roadblocks do you encounter — practically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually? Consider which roadblocks might be self-imposed. For those which are societally structural, what are ways you can engage with those hurdles creatively and in community, trusting you don't have to walk this path alone?
- In your current season of life, are you feeling more called to find support in claiming your essential gift of rest or more invited to support others in their journey to find rest? A convergence of the two? Utilize your sacred imagination to visualize what these invitations might uniquely look like in your life.
- What celebratory and restorative acts do you or could you engage in as a foundation for joy? What you would like to embrace as your own symbol of Sabbath rest?
- In what area of your life are you holding on to a scarcity mindset? Where is it easier for you to recognize abundance? Where does your call to practice generosity intersect with your experience of scarcity and abundance?
- Consider the relationship between trust and anxiety as concepts. Then consider the relationship between your trust and your anxiety. If they were to have a conversation, what would they say to one another? What words of wisdom does your trust have to offer you?



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Week 3:

Fast from Speed and Rushing Embrace Slowness and Pausing

- Name where in your life you find yourself treated as currency. What are ways you can counter that narrative both privately and in community? What are the practices and rituals you can weave into your personal and public environments?
- What is your current relationship with transition spaces? When invited to transform these threshold moments into opportunities for holy pause, what stirs inside you? To accept this invitation to fast from rushing and overscheduling, what would need to change — where will you offer yourself the gift of pausing?
- Consider what might be your Mt. Olive: what spaces, practices, people, music, etc. serve as your place of rest and retreat? If it's difficult to identify any at this time, consider utilizing your breath and/or a breath prayer to help connect you to a place of rest and retreat.
- When and how in your life have you been stretched too thin? What patterns do you notice?
- What gifts of slowness have you observed or received in the practice of holy pause and in the daily invitations? Are there holy rhythms emerging?
- What are the scattered parts of you that long to be gathered into the wholeness of your being?



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Week 4:

Fast from Holding It All Together Embrace Tenderness and Vulnerability

- Recall a time in your life when you felt pressured to be strong and hold it all together. Can you identify where those messages came from — broad, cultural pressures and/or specific persons' voices?
- What masks and self-deceptions do you use to shield yourself? What are you shielding yourself from? What has been your experience when these walls and armor have dropped? When you begin to intentionally loosen your grip, what longings of the heart are revealed?
- Consider your current relationship with tears — tears of others and your own. What is the narrative that's developed surrounding tears? Have you ever experienced or considered radical vulnerability as a portal to divine grace? What new story of grief, sorrow, and tears do you want to live into?
- What might you let go of to make space for your tears and sorrow? What space in your heart is carved out by your tears? What does that space feel like and long for?
- As you engage in this week's practices, what are your tender places that are beginning to soften? Where do you feel them in your body? What images, words, prayers, or sensations do they evoke?
- If grief is an expression of our love, what are your tears and sorrows teaching you about your love?



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Week 5:

Fast from Planning and Deadlines Embrace Unfolding and Ripening

- What is your relationship with silence? How has it shifted throughout your life? When are the times silence has been life-giving and an opportunity to hear God speaking into your life? When has it been poisonous or abusive — a weapon used either against or by you?
- When has life's beauty ushered you into an experience of wonder and beholding? What might those experiences teach you about the silence of God?
- What aspect of planning are you gripping tightly in order to feel a sense of control? What is it you feel desperate to control?
- When invited to fast from planning, what emotions or thoughts arise? Relief? Fear? A mixture of feelings? What are patterns in your life that are in resonance or dissonance with this invitation?
- Consider what helps sustain you in your commitment to diligence, patience, and attending to the slow ripening of things. What are the practices, rituals, symbols, etc. that help bring you into a new relationship with time?
- Where are the places in your life you feel connected to your source? What wisdom does the Sacred Source have to offer you?



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Week 6:

Fast from Certainty Embrace Mystery and Waiting

- What images of God do you hold on to? What ways of thinking do you use to cope with ambiguity and disconnectedness?
- What is your relationship with mystery? What does the invitation to let mystery have a place within you evoke? What questions might you let go of examining in order to let them lie fallow?
- How has your spiritual journey unfolded through the seasons of your life? What is your spiritual journey asking of you in this season?
- What are your uncomfortable borderlands between loss and hope that invite you to strip away ego, power, and identity? What images and symbols help you connect to this borderland? Have you ever found beauty in the border spaces?
- What questions are stirring inside you as you make this journey into the unknown? What have you noticed about your ability to rest in these questions versus forcing or requiring an answer?
- Recall past “dark nights of the soul” or times of deep unknowing — what were the certainties that were stripped away at that time? With your reflections and practices from this week in mind, what words, images, or symbols would you offer your past self? Can that offering be a resource for you now as you continue to intentionally fast from certainty and embrace mystery and waiting?



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Living the Wisdom Forward:

Resurrection Blessings

- What are the precious and vital discoveries you have made space for over the course of this Lenten journey?
- Which of the seven fasts challenged you the most? Was there one that aligned more easily with where you are in your spiritual journey?
- What is the abundance that is gathering in the spaciousness you've created? What is the new life emerging — your Easter feast?
- As you consider which practices to continue, reflect on the past weeks, and ask yourself: Where are the places I've softened? What is something I let go of that was unexpected? What have I begun to embrace?
- What helps you embrace a “beginner’s mind” and commit to continually returning to your spiritual journey?
- How will you embody the celebration of the resurrection?



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