



RECOMMENDED READ:

HOPE: THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Recommendation by Tim McCormick

Hope: The Autobiography may be the first ever autobiography published by a Pope. Published just a few weeks ago, this beautiful, yet very accessible text, traces the many key moments in the life of Pope Francis, with particular attention to how the theological virtue of Hope has always been present in both the joyful and difficult moments. Of particular interest is his reflections on being elected Pope in 2013, as well as the various challenges he has faced during his papacy. The book includes various photos from his life and can be a great spiritual read during this season of Lent. It can also serve as an aid to prayer, as we continue to pray for the health of Pope Francis.

RECOMMENDED SCRIPTURE

Recommendation by Steve Petty

The Christian disciple has a unique call to be like God; in other words, to become holy. This call to holiness can be found in several places in the sacred scriptures, but perhaps is most explicit in 1 Peter when Peter states the following:

"Therefore, gird up your minds, be sober, set your hope fully upon the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'" (1 Peter 1:13-16)

This call by God to be holy is nothing more than an invitation to be in communion with God and to live a life that leaves an imprint of God's presence on the world. The more we seek communion with God and avail ourselves of God's grace, the more our hearts are transformed and we become Christ-like.

The road to Christian holiness is a summons to learn from Christ, to be empowered by his presence and to be freed from the sin that blinds us and binds our hearts. Pope Francis put this very succinctly in "The Joy of the Gospel" where he wrote, *"Jesus Christ loves you, he gave his life to save you and now he is living by your side everyday to enlighten, strengthen and free you."*

This Lenten season, make your relationship with Jesus your top priority. We know that Jesus is always by our side, but we need to invite Jesus into our lives as well. Our relationship with Jesus is not a one way street. We need to show Jesus we want Him in our lives. This Lent, invite Jesus into your life and ask Him to transform you with His grace. Simply increase the time you spend with Jesus in prayer. If we want to become holy as God is holy, we need to spend more time with Him.

RECOMMENDED LENTEN PRACTICES

Recommendation by Ken Pullis

Yesterday was Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent. As Catholics, we are encouraged to observe this holy season by embracing three traditional practices: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. All three of these practices help us turn away from sin and towards God as we prepare to celebrate the joy of Easter. Here are some recommendations in each of these areas.

Prayer: Many parishes offer Stations of the Cross on Friday during Lent. This is a great way to meditate on the suffering of Jesus. You might even find a parish offering a Fish Fry so that you can feed your body (with some tasty fish) and your soul (with some meditative prayer in the Stations of the Cross). Another suggestion is to read and reflect on the Gospel According to Luke. This Gospel has some amazing passages on God's mercy and forgiveness. This is the perfect message for this time of conversion.

Fasting: We often think of fasting as giving up our favorite food (ie. junk food, dessert, pop, french fries, alcohol, etc.) and there is certainly some benefit in making these kinds of sacrifices during Lent. However, we can also look for more creative ways to do this. Here are a few ideas that I found on a Catholic website.

1. Complaining

Best for: Those who struggle to see the good in situations or people

Spiritual benefits: Cultivates gratitude and a positive outlook, helping you focus on God's blessings

Difficulty: 4

Complaining is often a subconscious habit, so it requires vigilance and prayerful awareness

"Do everything without complaining and arguing." Philippians 2:14

2. Procrastinating

Best for: Students, workers, or anyone prone to putting things off

Spiritual benefits: Encourages diligence and reminds you to use your time wisely as a gift from God

Difficulty: 4

Breaking the cycle of procrastination can be uncomfortable but liberating!

"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men" Colossians 3:23

3. Driving Impatiently

Best for: Daily commuters or those who get a little frustrated in traffic

Spiritual benefits: Develop patience and self-control

Difficulty: 2

A practical and tangible way to grow in virtue

"Better a patient person than a warrior, one with self-control than one who takes a city." Proverbs 16:32

4. Buying Non-Essential Items

Best for: Impulse and online shoppers.

Spiritual benefits: Promotes detachment from material goods and a simpler lifestyle

Difficulty: 3

Saying no to small, tempting purchases requires discipline

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth...but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven." Matthew 6:19-21

5. Food Delivery or Eating Out

Best for: Busy individuals or foodies.

Spiritual benefits: Encourages simplicity and gratitude for home-cooked meals

Difficulty: 4

Requires planning and effort to cook consistently

"So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." 1 Corinthians 10:31

6. Skipping Sunday Rest

Best for: Workaholics (or procrastinators)

Spiritual benefits: Honors the Sabbath as God intended, creating space for worship and reflection

Difficulty: 3

Letting go of work for a full day requires trust in God's providence

"So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." 1 Corinthians 10:31

Almsgiving: Americans are famous for being very generous in donating to worthy causes and supporting many different charities. This Lent choose a charity or cause to support. Some great Catholic charities include: The Society of St. Vincent de Paul, The Knights of Columbus, and Catholic Charities of the USA. We all can make a difference this Lent!