

STEP BY STEP: HOW TO DO *THE ASCENSION LENTEN COMPANION* IN YOUR PARISH OR SMALL GROUP

Before Lent

- [Order journals in bulk](#) for your group or parish. Here are the bulk discounts.

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- Spread the word! Use [these free resources](#) from Ascension, including flyers, bulletin announcements, and pulpit announcements.
- Bring everyone together to **watch the [5-minute Ash Wednesday video](#) or email it out**. Distribute the journals at this event or make them available at the back of the church.

During Lent

- Each week, send the 5-minute [weekly video](#) to your parish or participants via email. We have partnered with Flocknote to premake these emails for you—find them [here](#) beginning mid-January 2024!
- **Small groups meet once a week during Lent.** You can structure a weekly meeting like this (1–1.5 hours):
 - » Opening prayer (5 minutes).
 - » Watch the video for the week (10 minutes).
 - » Invite each member to share a high and a low for the week (optional, 10–15 minutes).
 - » Go over the weekly reflection questions as a group (40–55 minutes). These questions are in the *Lenten Companion* journal, so participants will already be thinking about them. They are also reprinted here, on the next page.
 - » Closing prayer (5 minutes).
- For individual or parish-wide **weekly Stations of the Cross devotion**, use Fr. Mark Toups' [The Way of the Cross: Praying the Psalms with Jesus](#) to pray what Jesus would have prayed during his Passion. Packs of 10 or 100 are available as well!

Weekly Reflection Questions

Week of Ash Wednesday (February 14-18)

- As we explored this week, Lent is an encounter with a person—Jesus—and no matter how many Lents you have experienced, you are a different person now than you were in previous years. What unique experiences from the past year are you carrying into this Lenten journey? Where is the Lord coming to meet you as we begin?
- Please return to the definitions of “resolute” and “determined” that we broke down on p. 9. This season, Jesus asks us: “Are you *resolutely determined* to follow me to Jerusalem?” What practical things can you do to help yourself commit to this journey over the next five weeks? In what ways can you daily accept Jesus’ invitation to follow him?
- **VIDEO REFLECTION:** What did you think about the story of the old man feeding the birds? In what ways does the man’s response to the two boys relate to your experience and journey with Jesus this Lent?
- Now take a moment to reflect on the past week, going over the meditations that bore the most fruit in your prayer, the things you wrote, and your reflections on this week’s video. How has your prayer changed this week?

First Week of Lent (February 19-25)

- Return to the list on p. 34. What bullet point(s) do you relate to the most right now? What struggle is Jesus asking you to surrender to him this Lent so that he may fill you up again?
- As we mentioned earlier this week, Jesus loves *you* personally, intimately, with all his strength. He particularly loves that which makes you *you*: your humor, your quirks, your spirit, your whole self. Thinking about just how specific and individual his love is for you, what thoughts and feelings come to mind?
- **VIDEO REFLECTION:** How does picturing Jesus as a Bridegroom affect your understanding of his mission and his journey to Jerusalem? How does it affect the way you see your relationship with Jesus?
- Now take a moment to reflect on the past week, going over the meditations that bore the most fruit in your prayer, the things you wrote, and your reflections on this week’s video. How has your prayer changed this week?

Second Week of Lent (February 26–March 3)

- Have you experienced Jesus’ limitless compassion? In what ways has Jesus entered into your suffering? What wounds are you asking him to heal for you?
- As we explored this week (and will continue to explore in future weeks), Jesus made certain religious authorities uncomfortable because he did not fit into their preconceived “boxes” and he challenged their understanding of the Law. In what ways have you put Jesus into a box of your own? What self-imposed limits have you placed on his love and mercy? Do you believe he is

willing to love you in your mess? How is Jesus calling you to a deeper understanding of who he is and the healing he wants to bring to your life?

- **VIDEO REFLECTION:** Take a moment to study the painting of the Good Samaritan that Fr. Toups mentions, painted by Johan Carl Loth. (You might also look up other “Good Samaritan” paintings by other artists, e.g., Rembrandt or Van Gogh.) As you look at the artwork(s), imagine yourself in the position of the wounded man and Jesus as the Good Samaritan. What would you say to Jesus as he comes to you in the place where you need to be loved the most?
- Now take a moment to reflect on the past week, going over the meditations that bore the most fruit in your prayer, the things you wrote, and your reflections on this week’s video. How has your prayer changed this week?

Third Week of Lent (March 4-10)

- In what ways have you experienced hearing the voice of the Good Shepherd in your life? What can help you better listen to God’s voice?
- What aspects of your life make you feel restless right now? What lies have the voices of the world been telling you to tempt you to go astray? Like the loving father in the parable of the Prodigal Son, how is Jesus inviting you to return to him, trust in him, and go deeper with him?
- **VIDEO REFLECTION:** As Fr. Toups says in this video, “Mercy is love bestowed when we don’t deserve it.” With that thought in mind, what strikes you the most about this painting of *The Return of the Prodigal Son* by Pompeo Batoni?
- Now take a moment to reflect on the past week, going over the meditations that bore the most fruit in your prayer, the things you wrote, and your reflections on this week’s video. How has your prayer changed this week?

Fourth Week of Lent (March 11-17)

- As we explored this week, it’s not a matter of whether we have questions for and about God, but instead *where we go* with the questions (or, rather, *to whom we go*). What questions about Jesus, his Passion, his Church, or your faith have arisen in your heart this week? How is God inviting you to bring those questions back to him in prayer?
- Which individual(s) from this week’s readings and reflections stood out to you the most: the ten lepers, the blind beggar, the Apostles, the Pharisees, Zacchaeus, Judas, someone else? Why? How does picturing Jesus’ journey from their perspective teach you something more about God, his love, his mercy, and/or your relationship with him?
- **VIDEO REFLECTION:** Throughout Lent, in what ways have you sensed Jesus inviting you to surrender the boundaries and “boxes” in your heart that you have used to keep him out?
- Now take a moment to reflect on the past week, going over the meditations that bore the most fruit in your prayer, the things you wrote, and your reflections on this week’s video. How has your prayer changed this week?

Fifth Week of Lent (March 18-24)

- Pope Benedict XVI teaches us that, to give God our full, absolute “yes,” we must begin by giving him our many little “yeses” and small daily sacrifices. In what area(s) of your life can you try to offer God more of your little “yeses”? What places in your heart is God waiting for you to surrender to him so that healing and new growth can take place?
- As we reflected on yesterday, fasting can be challenging—but the best way to succeed in a challenge is to have a plan. To prepare for Holy Week, what steps can you take now to help yourself fast from (or at least strictly limit) using your smartphone, excess noise, and food and alcohol? Who will hold you accountable?
- **VIDEO REFLECTION:** Follow Fr. Toups as he leads you in the guided meditation in this video. What strikes you the most as you imagine this scene? How do you feel this moment launching you into Holy Week?
- Now take a moment to reflect on the past week, going over the meditations that bore the most fruit in your prayer, the things you wrote, and your reflections on this week’s video. How has your prayer changed this week?