



18. February 2026
LENTEN SPIRITUAL RETREAT
Day 1: “A path of conversion, penance, and prayer”

Introductory Reflections

Lent occupies a very important place in the liturgical year. It begins today with Ash Wednesday and ends on Holy Saturday. For forty days and forty nights, the faithful embark on a journey of profound conversion to prepare for the celebration of Easter.

The flood lasted forty days and forty nights; it took Israel forty years to cross the desert before entering the Promised Land; forty days Moses fasted before receiving the Law for his people; forty days the prophet Elijah made his pilgrimage to Mount Horeb; and forty days and forty nights Our Lord Jesus Christ fasted in the desert before beginning His public ministry and revealing Himself as the Son of God.

On a liturgical level, this time emphatically urges us to meditate on the Passion of the Lord, the grace of Holy Baptism, and penance. The classic practices that should accompany Lent are fasting, prayer, and almsgiving. It is also often recommended to live it as a time of retreat—that is, to distance oneself from the distractions of the world, to avoid unnecessary celebrations and festivities, and above all to devote time to prayer and intimate dialogue with God.

Lent should be imbued with a holy seriousness that is in no way contrary to inner joy, but rather encourages it. In fact, spiritual joy increases as we undergo the interior purification that the Holy Spirit carries out in us. He is the love poured into our hearts (Rom 5:5), so we can set ourselves the goal of growing in love during this holy time. All penitential practices and renunciations, all expiation and participation in the Lord’s suffering must serve this end.

The Lord Himself gives us a key guideline on the first day of Lent:

“And when you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by men. (...) But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face,¹⁸ that your fasting may not be seen by men but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” (Mt 6:16–18).

With this attitude, we want to begin Lent, asking for the guidance of the Holy Spirit so that it may be a very fruitful time for the Kingdom of God.

Ash Wednesday

The liturgy of Ash Wednesday is marked by the blessing of the ashes—accompanied by profound prayers—and their imposition on the faithful. When the priest traces the cross of ashes on their foreheads, he pronounces these words: “*Remember, man, that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.*”

In this way, we begin Lent by remembering our transience as creatures. This awareness helps us humbly recognize the passing nature of all earthly things. It makes us receptive to the reality that we are creatures whom the heavenly Father has called to life with infinite love, but who have strayed from Him through disobedience. This condition is due not only to original sin, which caused the loss of the paradisiacal state, but also to our personal sins, which separate us from God. From this starting point, it is clear that we are in need of conversion and forgiveness for our sins.

In today’s reading, the prophet Joel exhorts us: “*‘Yet even now,’ says the Lord ‘return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments. ’Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and repents of evil.*” (Joel 2:12–13).

The great theme contained in these words—turning back to God—will accompany us until the end of our lives. If we understand that this is a matter of love, then we will have the key. All sins are offenses against true love and, therefore, against our heavenly Father. This certainty must sink deep into us so that our hearts are torn apart and we can weep for our sins. This is what true conversion consists of: deep repentance and sorrow, grief for our sins and for our inability to love God as He wants us to love Him. But we can go even further: it is not only sorrow for our personal sins, but also sorrow for the countless people who live in sin without repenting. This impels us to pray fervently for the conversion of all people and to offer our own sincere conversion to our heavenly Father as atonement for sinners.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus exhorts us to seek lasting treasures: “*Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*” (Mt 6:19–21)

The true treasures are all the works we do in accordance with God’s will. These are the lasting treasures of love, capable of transforming the world, and which will be attributed to us as merits in eternity. Aspiring to them is already a sign of true conversion. We can simply ask our Father at the beginning of the day: “What can we do for You today?” In this way, we lift up our hearts to God. Without a doubt, He

will answer us and give us opportunities to store up treasures in heaven.

Following the example of St. Francis de Sales, each day we will gather a “spiritual flower” from meditation—that is, a fruit or purpose that we will try to put into practice in our lives. At the end of Lent, we will present the “bouquet of flowers” to the Lord and to the Virgin Mary.

Today’s spiritual flower is this: begin Lent with humility, seriously embark on the path of conversion, and store up treasures in heaven.

Final note: During this Lenten retreat, the “3 Minutes for Abba” will meditatively complement the theme addressed in the daily meditations. You can listen to them here:

<https://en.elijamission.net/category/3-minutes-for-god-the-father/>

Meditation on the reading of the day: <https://en.elijamission.net/ash-wednesday-holy-fasting/>

Meditation on the Gospel of the day: <https://en.elijamission.net/prayer-fasting-and-almsgiving-2/>