



*An Introduction to the Lenten Season*  
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### ***Return to Me with All Your Heart***

Here we are again—the time we call Lent. For many of us, the word “Lent” connotes drab days, giving up things and a long, long time waiting for spring. Lent means many things. A time of repentance. A time of sacrifice. A preparation for Easter. A time of letdown after the excitement of Christmas and New Year’s hopes.

We often overlook another meaning—the idea that Lent is an invitation to “return,” to be reconciled with God, with each other and with ourselves. Lent calls us to return to our hearts, to see what’s there and act from what we see. Lent *is* a season of the heart.

The scriptures, both the Hebrew Prophets and the New Testament texts, are our guides for the journey of Lent. They make a powerful point, one that our culture often forgets: it is the heart that matters. What is in our heart deeply influences our vision, our hearing, our behavior.

Lent begins on a day we call “Ash Wednesday.” On that day, Christians everywhere are called to remember, repent and return. Through the symbol of ashes, we are asked to remember that we are of the earth, created by another, and will not walk the earth forever. We are asked to repent; to look at ourselves, to recognize our separation from our God, and to return to the one who has created us.

Repentance, remembering, returning to God—all of these begin in our hearts. None of these is an intellectual exercise. Returning to our hearts is often difficult for those in the health care ministry. It’s too easy to get our hearts broken.

Clinicians witness much pain and sorrow; others encounter many obstacles while trying to make healing possible. We talk about moral fatigue, steeling ourselves, staying objective.

But what if Lent is a time to return to our hearts and find comfort there, and solace, and strength? What if Lent is a time to return to our souls and find our calling and our source of life? Is that what happened for Jesus when he was in a desert for 40 days? Can that happen for us?

(over)



## Lenten Reflections

In the scripture reading for Ash Wednesday, the prophet Joel cries:

Even now, says the Lord,  
Return to me with your whole heart,  
With fasting and weeping, and mourning;  
Rend your hearts, not your garments,  
And return to the Lord your God.

Why should we take the risk to do this? Joel answers:

For gracious and merciful is God,  
Slow to anger, rich in kindness,  
And relenting in punishment.  
(Joel 2: 12-13)

Lent need not be drab. Lent can be a time of finding ourselves and finding ourselves held in the mercy and rich kindness of the God who loves us.

*The Catholic Health Association would like to thank Jon Sarta for allowing us to use his music from the albums "The Catholic Music Project Volume V: Lent," and "The Catholic Music Project Volume VI: Easter" for the podcast version of this reflection. His music can be obtained from [mljmusic.com](http://mljmusic.com).*