

# Growing in FAITH™

Discovering hope and joy in the Catholic faith.

February 2024

ST. THOMAS THE APOSTLE PARISH

StThomasWestSpringfield.org

## One Minute Meditations

### St. Josephine Bakhita

Born in Darfur, Sudan around 1869, she was kidnapped and sold into slavery. Her captors gave her the name Bakhita, meaning "fortunate." After several years of serving under cruel masters, she was bought by Augusto Michieli. The Michielis sent Bakhita with their daughter to Italy, where Bakhita encountered Catholicism. Overjoyed, she was baptized and took the name Josephine. In 1893, instead of returning to Africa with the Michielis, she entered the Institute of St. Magdalene of Canossa.



### The moment of truth

Conversion begins when we accept responsibility for our failures. Lent is an opportunity to stop and take a good look at our lives. Identify all the ways that sin keeps you from living the way Jesus taught us to live. Know that it may take courage to face your shortfalls.

"Apart from the cross, there is no other ladder by which we may get to heaven." St. Rose of Lima



## Deepen the connection to Christ during Lent

The key to a fruitful Lent is not to perform miserable penances. A good Lent hinges on encountering Christ in a personal way and letting Him change our hearts and minds. In fact, an effective way to deepen our encounter with Him is through the Eucharist. Consider these suggestions:

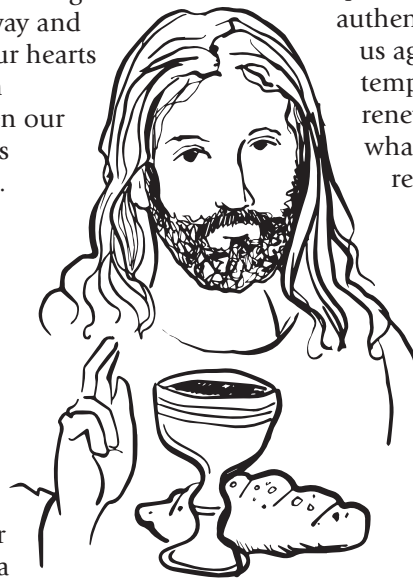
**"Here I am, Lord. Love me!"** Mother Teresa told her sisters to start their chapel time with this bold prayer, "Here I am, Lord. Love me!" No matter whether you are in His Presence for Mass, a holy hour, or a quick visit in front of the Blessed Sacrament, begin with, "Here I am, Lord. Love me!" It's a prayer of faith God delights to answer.

**Live for the next Communion.**

Every Communion deepens our union with God, strengthens our faith, helps us love more authentically, and immunizes us against future temptations. Each week, renew your resolve to do whatever is needed to receive Jesus well. For example, avoid activity or entertainment that tempts you away from God, and if you sin seriously, immediately go to Confession and start anew.

**Invite others to the feast.** Invite a friend, neighbor or colleague to Mass or Adoration

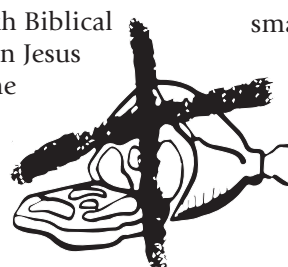
with you. Pray for priests to stay close to the Eucharist. Most importantly, pray that more people come to faithfully encounter Jesus in the tabernacle.



## Why Do Catholics Do That?

## Why do Catholics have to fast on Ash Wednesday?

Fasting is a practice with Biblical roots, most notably, when Jesus fasted for forty days in the desert. Those in good health, aged 18-59, are required to fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. We're permitted one full meal and two



smaller meals that together don't equal the full meal. This includes abstaining from meat. Fasting expresses our recognition that we've sinned and desire to make amends. It purifies our hearts and frees them to love God and others well.

# Pope Francis's three-point approach to Confession

Instead of dreading seeking the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation (Confession), Pope Francis suggested we look at it as "the Sacrament of the tenderness of God, His way of embracing us." Follow the pope's three-point approach to the Sacrament:

**What's my intention?** Rather than an obligation, consider the Sacrament a fresh start. Firmly resolve, from this moment forward, to give up the activities or behaviors that separate you from God. The firm resolution to change is key to receiving absolution effectively.

**Are there loose ends?** Unconfessed sin creates



distance between us and God. Make sure you have not withheld mortal sins in prior Confessions, either intentionally or accidentally. If you become aware that you have, confess them and leave the confessional a new man or woman.

**Have I completed the assigned penance?**

The Sacrament is meant to change us.

Purposefully make amends and continue your resolutions to realign your life to the Gospel.

Seeking Reconciliation often and staying in a state of grace helps us become holier people of God.

## from Scripture

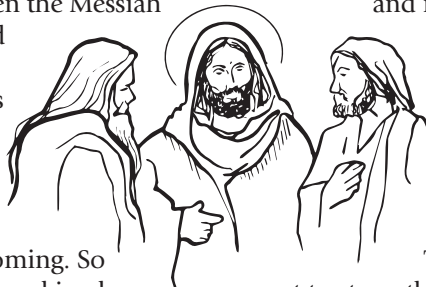
### Mark 9:2-10, Heavenly glory, not worldly power

In Jesus' time, Israel was occupied by the Romans. The Israelites already had a long history of being attacked and conquered by other nations. The Jews dreamed of the day when the Messiah would set them free and make them the victors.

God had set up Moses as liberator and lawgiver, and sent them Elijah, the first of the great prophets who foretold Christ's coming. So when Jesus was transfigured in glory with Moses and Elijah, the Apostles assumed that God was revealing Jesus as the Messiah.

Moses and Elijah spoke with Jesus about His death and Resurrection.

Jesus warned His disciples that He would suffer and die (Mark 8:31). While many Jews were expecting the Messiah to overthrow the Romans and make Himself king,



God revealed that the Messiah would save His people by His own death and Resurrection.

The Transfiguration was meant to strengthen the faith of the Apostles and prepare them for the Passion. The Transfiguration reminds us that however difficult this life may be there is unimaginable glory that awaits us in Heaven.

## Q & A Why should we "offer it up"?

When tempted to complain about suffering, we may be encouraged to "offer it up" instead. This act of surrender carries incredible spiritual power.

**A share in Christ's Cross.** Because Jesus is God, His suffering and sacrifice have infinite value. When we unite even our



small sufferings to Jesus' suffering, it takes on an infinite value in helping Him to save souls.

**Spiritual "strength training."** When we offer our sufferings to God, He is able to work on our hearts. Suffering for others helps us to become less selfish and more compassionate, less hard-hearted and more patient, less self-indulgent and more generous. Our hearts emerge more Christ-like, and better able to love.

**Prudence is needed.** Under most circumstances, encouragement to "offer it up" works as a spiritual discipline for inconveniences or mild suffering. Sometimes, however, remediation or professional help may be needed. God sees the sincerity of our love so we can still offer our suffering to Him and yet take constructive action to remediate whatever is causing the suffering. Be prudent.

## Feasts & Celebrations

**February 3 – St. Blaise (316).** A bishop in fourth-century Turkey, St. Blaise was arrested for being a Christian. On his way to jail, he healed a young boy choking on a fish bone. Refusing to deny his faith, the bishop was martyred.

**February 11 – Our Lady of Lourdes (1858).** A heavenly lady appeared to St. Bernadette Soubirous, a poor girl from a French village, and a spring with miraculous, healing waters emerged from a nearby cave. The lady revealed herself as the "Immaculate

Conception," the Blessed Virgin Mary.

**February 14 – Ash Wednesday.** The first day of Lent. Ashes of old palms are placed on the forehead as a sign of penance. It's also a day of abstinence from meat and fasting – one regular meal and two small meals that together don't equal a full meal.

**February 22 – The Chair of St. Peter.** Marking St. Peter's establishment of the Holy See, on this festival we thank God for His Church and pray for its holy preservation.



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To provide practical ideas that promote faithful Catholic living.

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(540)662-7844 (540)662-7847 fax

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(Unless noted Bible quotes and references are from the Revised Standard Version and the New American Bible)