

**St. Michael Parish Men's Group – Wheeling, West Virginia
Into the Desert: Following Christ in the Wilderness-
A 40-Day Catholic Men's Retreat**

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To: All who are willing to venture into the Lenten desert

From: Alex J. Nagem
crhp55@comcast.net
(304) 280-8017

Re: St. Michael Parish Lenten Retreat

Thank you for your desire to enter into this Lenten Retreat. I am deeply grateful for your willingness to step into the desert with me during these forty days of Lent. The heart of the retreat is a call to prayer, repentance, and renewal.

This retreat was intentionally designed in simplicity, keeping distractions and costs to a minimum. There are no ornate pages or elaborate designs-only a humble framework meant to draw our attention away from appearances and toward the quiet work God desires to do within us.

In the packet, you will find the following:

- The Purpose of the Retreat
- A simple calendar showing the days of the retreat. From Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday, the Church marks forty-six days along the Lenten journey. Yet, Sundays, radiant with the joy of the Resurrection, are never counted as days of penance. Setting these feast days aside, the Church arrives at forty days-a sacred span echoing Christ's time in the desert- given to fasting, prayer, and interior conversion.
- The Overview of the retreat-what is expected of you each day.
 - **The Scripture reading** is intentionally brief, offered not to exhaust the Word, but to awaken the heart and invite prayerful reflection.
 - **The Reflection**, rooted in the Scripture reading, creates a sacred space for unhurried time with God, allowing His Word to speak personally to the heart.
 - **The Prayer** is meant to be returned to throughout the day, fostering an ongoing conversation with God and keeping the heart attentive to His presence.
 - **The Practical Action** is a simple, symbolic exercise meant to give visible form to an interior movement of the heart. It is not about accomplishment, but about attentiveness-an outward gesture that helps embody prayer, repentance, or trust, and invites the grace of God into the ordinary moments of the day.
 - **The Fasting** invites you into a deeper form of fasting that goes beyond simply giving something up. Each fast opens a sacred space in your heart where God can work more freely in your life.
 - **Evening Examen** helps us recognize God's presence throughout the day, give thanks for His grace, and honestly reflect on where we responded well or failed to respond to His call, so that we may grow in awareness and conversion tomorrow.
 - **In addition:** Each day, pray the Holy Rosary, make a sincere Act of Contrition, and if you want, journalize your thoughts. This is not a record to treasure, but a vessel to release your worries, fears, joys, and conversations with God. The journal is to be cast aside (destroyed) along with burdens and worries held within its pages. This is a quiet act of renewal and surrender.

- The Retreat-You will begin your retreat on Ash Wednesday with the Opening Prayer, the proclamation of Scripture, a time of reflection, and a Prayer of Deliverance. These are to be prayed on that day, together with the spiritual practices assigned for Day One of Lent.
- Instruction on how to pray the Ignatian Daily Examen
- Examination of Conscience based on the Ten Commandments
- Individual Examination of Conscience-7 Deadly Sins, and an Act of Contrition
- Fasting Guide, this is included on the individual retreat days.

Please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions, concerns, or uncertainties along the way. May God bless you with every breath you take, and may this Lenten retreat lead you to a place of deep renewal and lasting peace.

Though I have written the words, all honor and glory belong to the Holy Spirit for His guidance and to Our Triune God for the inspiration and loving direction. May every reflection, prayer, and practice here draw you closer to His presence, fill you with His grace, and renew your heart in the quiet of this Lenten journey.

Blessings,

Alex

St. Michael Parish Men's Group – Wheeling, West Virginia
Into the Desert: Following Christ in the Wilderness-
A 40-Day Catholic Men's Retreat (Rev5)

Overview:

A retreat is a chance to step away from life's demands and explore what lies beneath the surface. Each day of this retreat is yours alone: no expectations, no performative masks: just honest reflection, solitude, and the quiet courage of showing up for yourself.

You'll rise and engage with practices that invite you deeper—journaling, prayer, walks in silence, or sitting with the questions that rarely get space. This retreat is about reconnecting with what truly matters and recognizing the voice inside that you might have been too busy to hear, God's loving voice speaking to you.

During the silent reflection, trust that God is looking upon you with a loving gaze. Journalize how you feel, if you desire, to see the progress you are making in experiencing God's love for you and your closeness to Him.

Though your path is personal, you are not alone. A circle of other men is walking theirs as well. You'll come together at intervals to share truthfully—the wins, the failures, the unexpected revelations. Not to fix each other, but to witness and walk alongside.

Let this sacred time become an offering of renewal—where the soul surrenders what burdens and receives what blesses. Release what no longer leads you closer to God, and anchor your heart in what does. Walk this journey one grace-filled day at a time.

Each day for the next 40 days will be filled with:

- *Scripture Verse*
- *Silent Reflection*, 10-15 minutes, or longer if you desire.
- *Short Reflective Prayer*, to be recited throughout the day.
- *Practical Action*: Symbolic exercise.
- *Fasting*: You are invited into a deeper form of fasting that goes beyond simply giving something up. Each fast opens a sacred space in your heart where God can work more freely in your life.
- *Evening Examen*-Before you retire for the night, enter into a quiet moment with the Lord using the five-step Ignatian Examen, and journalize your thoughts:
 1. *Thanksgiving*: Thanking God for the blessings and graces of the day.
 2. *Petition*: Ask God for grace to look at your actions of the day through His eyes.
 3. *Review the day*: Where did I go wrong? What did I do to receive God's grace today?
 4. *Forgiveness*: Ask for mercy where you missed the mark.
 5. *Renewal*: Resolve to walk more closely with Christ tomorrow.
- *Praying the Holy Rosary*: Inviting Our Lady to intercede and guide your heart closer to Christ.
- *Sincere Act of Contrition*: With humility and trust in God's mercy, place your soul into His care.
- *Journalizing*: Some may choose to keep a journal through these 40 days, not as a record to treasure, but as a vessel to release. When the journey ends, let it be cast aside along with burdens and worries once held within its pages, a quiet act of renewal and surrender.

The 40-day retreat will end with:

- A Final Reflection
- Religious Thought
- Closing Prayer and Commissioning Blessing

Into the Desert: Following Christ in the Wilderness- A 40-Day Catholic Men's Retreat (rev6)

Before you begin your retreat, take a moment to rest in God's presence and open your heart to His love with the following prayers, scripture verse, and reflection:

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father,
You have called me to set aside these days to grow closer to You.
Quiet my mind and still my heart, that I may hear Your voice and follow Your will.
Give me the courage to let go of anything that keeps me from loving You with my whole heart.
Fill me with Your Spirit, that I may walk in the footsteps of Christ, serve my brothers with humility, and bring Your light into the world. I place this retreat, and my life, entirely in Your hands.
Through Jesus Christ, My Lord and Savior.
Amen

Opening Scripture and Reflection

Scripture: Isaiah 43:4 "Because you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you, I give men in return for you, peoples in exchange for your life."

Imagine: Picture Jesus approaching, personally speaking your name, and offering His love for you.

Journalize: Write down what you sense God is saying to you about His love.

Prayer of Deliverance Through God's Love and Light

Loving Father, Eternal Light,
I come before You, ready to rest in Your presence.
Help me to lay aside my worries and distractions, so that my heart may be still with You.

Teach me to trust fully in Your mercy—
a mercy that holds me, heals me, and never lets me go.
Open my heart to receive the gift of Your abiding presence.

Give me the courage to pray with honesty,
bringing before You my joys, my struggles, and even my silence.
You are always near, waiting patiently for me to speak with You, as a son to his Father.

May these days together draw me closer to You,
so that in relaxing with You, I discover again that I am deeply cherished,
and in being renewed by Your grace, I may reflect Your compassion to others with a joyful heart.

I surrender myself to Your transforming Spirit, trusting fully in Your goodness.
Thank You for drawing me near, guiding my steps, and making me new in Your peace.
Amen.

Day 1: Into the Wilderness

Scripture: *Matthew 4:1* “Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.”

Reflection: Jesus was guided by the Spirit into the desert, not an accident. Your retreat begins with an invitation—what is your wilderness?

Prayer: “Lord, guide me through my wilderness seasons.”

Action: Spend 30 minutes in silence today. No phone, no distractions.

Fasting Focus and Suggestion: Physical Simplicity-Skip snacks between meals

Evening Examen: Where did I meet God today? What temptations surfaced?

Day 2: Confronting the Desert Within

Scripture: *Jeremiah 17:9* “The heart is deceitful above all things, desperately corrupt; who can understand it?”

Reflection: The hardest wilderness is the one inside us.

Prayer: “Purify my heart and align it with Your truth.”

Action: Identify three personal struggles in prayer.

Fasting Focus and Suggestion: Physical Simplicity-Avoid added sugar today

Evening Examen: What inner truths surfaced? Did I engage or avoid them?

Day 3: Thirst and Trust

Scripture: *Psalms 42:2* “My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God?”

Reflection: Emptiness invites trust. (Trust in God, who fills all emptiness with His presence and purpose)

Prayer: “Satisfy the thirst of my soul, O Lord.”

Action: Fast from something small. Offer it to God.

Fasting Focus and Suggestion: Physical Simplicity-Fast from meat today

Evening Examen: Where did I thirst most? Did I seek God or distractions?

Day 4: The Voice in the Silence

Scripture: *1 Kings 19:12* “And after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.”

Reflection: God whispers in silence—not thunder.

Prayer: “Help me hear Your voice in calm moments.”

Action: Journal for 15 minutes in stillness.

Fasting Focus and Suggestion: Physical Simplicity-No seasoning or sauces

Evening Examen: What did I hear—or not hear—in silence?

Day 5: Strength in Surrender

Scripture: *2 Corinthians 12:9* “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

Reflection: Weakness is a holy space for grace.

Prayer: “Your grace is enough for me, Lord.”

Action: Ask someone to pray with or for you today.

Fasting Focus and Suggestion: Physical Simplicity-Skip one meal and pray during that time

Evening Examen: Where did I feel weak? How did Grace show up?

Day 6: Temptation’s True Face

Scripture: *1 Corinthians 10:13* “No temptation... but God is faithful... will provide the way of escape.”

Reflection: Temptation loses its power when exposed to light. You’re never alone in facing it.

Prayer: “Lead me through trials with strength.”

Action: Make a Confession appointment or pray an honest Act of Contrition.

Fasting Focus and Suggestion: Physical Simplicity-No caffeine or stimulants (Good luck with this one)

Evening Examen: What temptation surfaced? Did I face it or rationalize it?

Day 7: Manna Moments

Scripture: *Deuteronomy 8:3* “He humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna... that man does not live by bread alone, but... by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord.”

Reflection: God often provides in unexpected ways. Look for the manna today.

Prayer: “Lord, nourish me with Your word daily.”

Action: Find and name one overlooked blessing.

Fasting Focus and Suggestion: Physical Simplicity-Eat only simple, whole foods (no processed items)

Evening Examen: What nourished me today? What am I hungry for?

Day 8: Desert Worship

Scripture: *Psalms 63:1* “O God, thou art my God, I seek thee, my soul thirsts for thee... in a dry and weary land.”

Reflection: Worship amid dryness births intimacy.

Prayer: “Quench my soul, Lord—draw me near to You.”

Action: Slowly pray a psalm or spiritual song.

Fasting Focus and Suggestion: Digital Detox-No social media or news apps

Evening Examen: What longing did I bring into prayer? Did I feel God’s closeness?

Day 9: Sifted Like Wheat

Scripture: *Luke 22:31* “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat.”

Reflection: Trials refine you—they’re not signs of abandonment.

Prayer: “Lord, strengthen me when I feel shaken.”

Action: Name one trial and ask Christ for endurance.

Fasting Focus and Suggestion: Digital Detox-No screen time after 6 PM

Evening Examen: What tested me today? Did I seek God’s strength?

Day 10: Clearing the Temple

Scripture: *John 2:15* “He made a whip of cords, and drove them all out of the temple... and overturned their tables.”

Reflection: Inner renewal requires cleansing. Purge the clutter.

Prayer: “Cleanse my heart, Lord, and make it a temple of peace.”

Action: Do a spiritual inventory. Identify what needs to go.

Fasting Focus and Suggestion: Digital Detox-Silence notifications on your cellphone

Evening Examen: What distracted me today? What space did I clear for God?

Day 11: The God Who Sees

Scripture: *Exodus 3:7* “I have seen the affliction of my people... and heard their cry... I know their sufferings.”

Reflection: You are not invisible. God sees your hidden battles and silent aches. His gaze is not passive—it’s filled with compassion.

Prayer: “Thank You for seeing and knowing me, Lord.”

Action: Reach out to someone who might feel unseen. Acknowledge their presence with love.

Fasting Focus and Suggestion: Digital Detox-Fast from non-essential internet browsing

Evening Examen: Did I feel seen today? Who did I notice was hurting? Where did I witness God’s tenderness?

Day 12: Walking Forward in Faith

Scripture: *2 Corinthians 5:7* “For we walk by faith, not by sight.”

Reflection: Trust doesn’t require a full roadmap—just the courage to take the next step. Faith thrives when vision fades.

Prayer: “Lead me in trust, God, even when I can’t see clearly.”

Action: Say yes to one thing today that stretches your faith, even if it feels uncertain.

Fasting Focus and Suggestion: Digital Detox-Replace entertainment with spiritual reading

Evening Examen: What steps of faith did I take? What fears lingered? Did I follow God’s lead?

Day 13: Weapons for the Wilderness

Scripture: *Ephesians 6:11* “Put on the whole armor of God... to stand against the wiles of the devil.”

Reflection: You're not left defenseless. Prayer, Scripture, brotherhood—these are your weapons of grace. Arm yourself daily.

Prayer: “Lord, make me strong with Your armor today.”

Action: Pray the Rosary today (or a decade). Let it be your spiritual armor.

Fasting Focus and Suggestion: Digital Detox-No music during commutes or workouts

Evening Examen: What temptations/trials emerged? Which spiritual tools did I use? Did I stand firm or falter?

Day 14: Following the Cloud

Scripture: *Exodus 13:21* “The Lord went before them... by day in a pillar of cloud... and by night in a pillar of fire.”

Reflection: God guides—sometimes subtly, sometimes boldly. Surrender your map and watch where His cloud drifts.

Prayer: “Lead me, day and night, into Your promise.”

Action: Let go of one plan or expectation today. Invite God to redirect you.

Fasting Focus and Suggestion: Digital Detox-Technology blackout for 1 hour

Evening Examen: Where did I try to take control? Where did I sense God's leading?

Day 15: Streams from the Rock

Scripture: *Psalms 78:20* “He smote the rock... water gushed out... Can He also give bread or provide meat?”

Reflection: God meets you in impossibility. Even when the desert feels bone-dry, He knows where to tap for grace.

Prayer: “Lord, help me trust what You can do—even what I've not seen.”

Action: Recall a past struggle that unexpectedly led to growth. Journal or share that story.

Fasting Focus and Suggestion: Emotional Detachment-No complaining or negativity

Evening Examen: What felt dry today? Where did God surprise me with refreshment?

Day 16: Waiting on the Lord

Scripture: *Isaiah 40:31* “But they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength... shall mount up with wings like eagles.”

Reflection: The desert teaches us to endure. Waiting on God isn't idle—it's a sacred posture of trust.

Prayer: “Renew me, Lord, as I wait on You.”

Action: Delay a decision today and pray over it instead. Give God room to speak.

Fasting Focus and Suggestion: Emotional Detachment-Avoid gossip or sarcasm

Evening Examen: What did I wait for today? How did patience affect my thoughts or actions?

Day 17: Clean Hands, Pure Heart

Scripture: *Psalms 24:3-4* “Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord?... He who has clean hands and a pure heart.”

Reflection: Holiness begins with honesty. Purity is less about perfection and more about authenticity.

Prayer: “Make me clean, Lord, inside and out.”

Action: Perform a quiet act of service today—let it reflect your desire for interior cleansing.

Fasting Focus and Suggestion: Emotional Detachment-Do not judge, no critical thoughts, reflection before reaction

Evening Examen: Where did I serve today? Was my heart humble or proud? What felt purified?

Day 18: Come Away and Rest

Scripture: *Mark 6:31* “Come away by yourselves to a lonely place and rest a while.”

Reflection: Even Jesus rested. Rest restores more than the body—it renews the soul.

Prayer: “Lord, let me find rest in Your quiet.”

Action: Schedule intentional downtime. Replace productivity with presence.

Fasting Focus and Suggestion: Emotional Detachment-Fast from defensive language

Evening Examen: Did I make time for rest today? What did I resist in slowing down?

Day 19: Wrestling in the Night

Scripture: *Genesis 32:24* “Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day.”

Reflection: God doesn’t avoid our struggles—He enters them. Wrestling is sacred ground.

Prayer: “Meet me in the wrestle, Lord, and rename me.”

Action: Spend time tonight naming and praying through one unresolved challenge.

Fasting Focus and Suggestion: Emotional Detachment-No “I” statements-focus on listening

Evening Examen: What did I wrestle with today? Did I engage God or try to avoid Him?

Day 20: I Will Give You Rest

Scripture: *Matthew 11:28* “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

Reflection: Jesus offers restoration. The desert doesn’t end in exhaustion, but resurrection.

Prayer: “Jesus, I lay my burdens at Your feet.”

Action: Visit Eucharistic Adoration or sit quietly in God’s presence. Let peace enter.

Fasting Focus and Suggestion: Emotional Detachment-Fast from self-pity or comparison

Evening Examen: What burden did I carry today? Did I lay it before Jesus?

Day 21: Let Your Light Shine

Scripture: *Matthew 5:14,16* “You are the light of the world... Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father.”

Reflection: The desert doesn't extinguish your light—it amplifies it. Your story, your love, and your witness illuminate the way for others.

Prayer: “Shine through me, Lord, in all I say and do.”

Action: Share a sincere word of encouragement with someone today. Be intentional and affirming.

Fasting Focus and Suggestion: Emotional Detachment-Choose affirmation over cynicism

Evening Examen: Who did I uplift today? Did I reflect Christ’s light? Where did light appear unexpectedly?

Day 22: Even Dry Bones Live

Scripture: *Ezekiel 37:5* “Thus says the Lord... Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live.”

Reflection: God revives the seemingly lifeless. No wound, failure, or dryness is beyond His reach. Life emerges in places we least expect.

Prayer: “Revive me, Lord—fill me with Your breath and life.”

Action: Intercede for someone who feels spiritually stuck. Offer your dryness as part of the prayer.

Fasting Focus and Suggestion: Distraction in Prayer-No multitasking during prayer

Evening Examen: Where did I feel lifeless today? What breath of hope stirred within me?

Day 23: Desert Temples

Scripture: *1 Corinthians 3:16* “Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?”

Reflection: You are sacred space. Protect the holy dwelling within you. Purity doesn't mean flawlessness—it means reverence.

Prayer: “Dwell in me, Lord. Make my life a place of worship.”

Action: Declutter your physical space today and invite God into the process.

Fasting Focus and Suggestion: Distraction in Prayer-Create a prayer space with no distractions

Evening Examen: How did I honor my inner temple today? What needs cleansing or protection?

Day 24: The Shepherd in the Wilderness

Scripture: *Psalms 23:4* “Even though I walk through the valley... I fear no evil; for thou art with me...”

Reflection: The Shepherd never abandons His flock—even in danger or shadow. Your steps are guided, even when unseen.

Prayer: “Walk with me, God—You are my comfort and my guide.”

Action: Take a slow walk—literally or metaphorically. Invite God to walk beside you.

Fasting Focus and Suggestion: Distraction in Prayer-Pray aloud (even briefly) to deepen focus

Evening Examen: Where did I feel fear today? Was I aware of God's presence in the valley?

Day 25: Standing on the Rock

Scripture: *Psalm 18:2* “The Lord is my rock... my fortress... my deliverer...”

Reflection: The desert may shake everything—but God is immovable. Standing on Him means standing in peace.

Prayer: “Be my rock, Lord—steady me in the storm.”

Action: Memorize this verse today and let it become your anchor.

Fasting Focus and Suggestion: Distraction in Prayer-Journal your prayers instead of just thinking them

Evening Examen: Where did I feel unstable today? How did God's strength support me?

Day 26: The Cost of Discipleship

Scripture: *Luke 14:27* “Whoever does not bear his own cross... cannot be my disciple.”

Reflection: The cross isn't punishment—it's the price of purpose. Discipleship invites us to carry more than we want, but far less than Christ carried for us.

Prayer: “Give me strength, Lord, to follow You faithfully.”

Action: Choose one cross—habit, burden, or commitment—and carry it consciously all day. Offer it up for someone else.

Fasting Focus and Suggestion: Distraction in Prayer-Begin prayer with 2 minutes of silence

Evening Examen: What cross did I carry today? Did I resist or embrace it? How did it draw me nearer to Christ?

Day 27: Driven by the Spirit

Scripture: *Mark 1:12* “The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.”

Reflection: Sometimes God sends us out—not in comfort, but in calling. The desert is no accident.

Prayer: “Lead me, Spirit, even into the wild places.”

Action: Ask in prayer: Why has God brought me here? Write what surfaces.

Fasting Focus and Suggestion: Distraction in Prayer-No praying while moving-sit, kneel, or stand

Evening Examen: Did I feel Spirit-led today or self-driven? What direction emerged?

Day 28: Standing Alone

Scripture: *Mark 14:50* “And they all forsook him, and fled.”

Reflection: Christ knows the pain of isolation. You’re not alone in being alone. Solitude is a sacred teacher.

Prayer: “Stay with me, Lord—even when others disappear.”

Action: Spend 20 minutes today in intentional solitude with no agenda—relax and listen.

Fasting Focus and Suggestion: Distraction in Prayer-Fast from noise: music, podcasts, videos

Evening Examen: Where did I feel alone today? What surfaced in the silence? Was Christ nearby?

Day 29: The Breaking Point

Scripture: *Isaiah 42:3* “A bruised reed he will not break... a dimly burning wick he will not quench...”

Reflection: God doesn’t crush the fragile—He shelters it. Your breaking point isn’t your end point.

Prayer: “Heal me tenderly, Lord—fan my flame anew.”

Action: Name one emotional or spiritual strain. Don’t fix it—offer it.

Fasting Focus and Suggestion: Time Reclamation-Give up one hour of TV and devote it to quiet

Evening Examen: What felt bruised in me today? How did mercy enter? What healing began?

Day 30: The Horizon of Hope

Scripture: *Isaiah 43:19* “Behold, I am doing a new thing... I will make a way in the wilderness...”

Reflection: Something new is always sprouting—even in sand. Hope breaks over the dunes, often unseen.

Prayer: “Do something new in me, Lord—I’m ready.”

Action: Draw, photograph, or write one symbol of hope. Keep it as a reminder.

Fasting Focus and Suggestion: Time Reclamation-No phone until after morning prayer

Evening Examen: What signs of hope emerged today? Did I recognize them? What newness is rising?

Day 31: Transfigured in the Wilderness

Scripture: *Matthew 17:2* “He was transfigured before them... his garments became white as light.”

Reflection: Transformation is happening, even when you don’t feel it. The desert strips you so that God can clothe you in glory.

Prayer: “Transfigure my heart with Your glory, Lord.”

Action: Write a personal letter from God's perspective to you. Speak encouragement and blessing.

Fasting Focus and Suggestion: Time Reclamation-Eliminate one unimportant task (difficult if you are OCD)

Evening Examen: What part of me is being transfigured? Did I notice spiritual growth today?

Day 32: The Still Waters

Scripture: *Psalms 23:2–3* “He makes me lie down... leads me beside still waters... restores my soul.”

Reflection: Restoration doesn’t come through force—but through stillness. Let God take you to quiet places inside.

Prayer: “Shepherd me gently, Lord—restore what is weary within.”

Action: Visit nature or spend quiet time picturing a peaceful place. Let God meet you there.

Fasting Focus and Suggestion: Time Reclamation-Plan the day with God before acting

Evening Examen: Did I experience inner peace today? What was restored in me?

Day 33: Intercession in the Desert

Scripture: *1 Timothy 2:1* “I urge that supplications, prayers... be made for all men.”

Reflection: Your retreat blesses others. When you intercede, you stretch grace across the desert.

Prayer: “Make me an intercessor, Lord, lifting others before You.”

Action: Choose three people to pray for today. Offer any discomfort as an intercession.

Fasting Focus and Suggestion: Time Reclamation-Fast from instant gratification

Evening Examen: Who did I carry in prayer today? How did it affect my mindset?

Day 34: Washed Clean

Scripture: *Isaiah 1:16* “Wash yourselves... make yourselves clean... cease to do evil.”

Reflection: Repentance isn't punishment—it's cleansing. God wants to free you from everything that burdens you. Make peace with any failures.

Prayer: “Purify me, Lord—lead me into holiness.”

Action: Seek the Sacrament of Reconciliation or pray a deep Evening Examen with God.

Fasting Focus and Suggestion: Time Reclamation-No late-night scrolling

Evening Examen: What surfaced in my conscience today? Did I experience mercy?

Day 35: Keep Watch

Scripture: *Luke 21:36* “Watch at all times, praying... to stand before the Son of man.”

Reflection: The final stretch of retreat calls for awareness. God's grace often moves in subtle signs.

Prayer: “Keep me watchful, Lord—always ready to stand before You.”

Action: Light a candle today in prayer and sit with it for five minutes. Stay alert in stillness.

Fasting Focus and Suggestion: Time Reclamation-Choose margin over busyness (breathing room over constantly being busy)

Evening Examen: Where did I witness God's movement today? What moments passed unnoticed?

Day 36: Hammer and Chisel

Scripture: *Jeremiah 23:29* “Is not my word like fire... and like a hammer...?”

Reflection: God's Word isn't soft—it breaks open what we've hidden and reshapes us into something stronger. Let Scripture challenge you.

Prayer: “Let Your words refine me like fire, O God.”

Action: Read today's verse aloud 3 times. Ask: What is God shattering in me?

Fasting Focus and Suggestion: Interior Disposition-Fast from control-let others lead

Evening Examen: What truth hit hard today? Where did resistance give way to surrender? How am I being reshaped?

Day 37: Rise and Walk

Scripture: *John 5:8* “Jesus said... ‘Rise, take up your pallet, and walk.’”

Reflection: Jesus doesn’t just heal—He commands movement. Restoration invites forward motion. Don’t lie in past pain.

Prayer: “Help me rise, Lord, and walk boldly into wholeness.”

Action: Do something today you've been avoiding—an email, a reconciliation, a prayer. Get up and go.

Fasting Focus and Suggestion: Interior Disposition-Identify and surrender one fear

Evening Examen: What did I rise from today? What tried to hold me back? Did I move in obedience or hesitation?

Day 38: Return Changed

Scripture: *Luke 4:14* “Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit...”

Reflection: Jesus came out of the desert not weaker, but empowered. So will you. Retreat is not retreating—it’s rewiring.

Prayer: “Empower me, Spirit, through every trial I’ve endured.”

Action: Reflect or journal: How have I changed since Day 1? What's been transformed?

Fasting Focus and Suggestion: Interior Disposition-Fast from pride-affirm someone else’s win

Evening Examen: What part of me is stronger now? What lessons will I carry home? Where do I feel the Spirit’s power?

Day 39: Sowing with Tears

Scripture: *Psalms 126:5* “May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy!”

Reflection: Every sacrifice, struggle, and silent prayer has planted something. The harvest of joy is coming.

Prayer: “Lord, let my sorrow bloom into joy.”

Action: Share one personal testimony or insight in your journal with the group. Speak hope into someone else's desert. (This is not a mandatory item.)

Fasting Focus and Suggestion: Interior Disposition-Name one recurring sin pattern-pray for deliverance

Evening Examen: What seeds of grace have I planted during these 39 days? What pain brought hidden growth? What joy is beginning to bloom?

Day 40: Resurrection Ground

Scripture: *Matthew 28:6* “He is not here; for he has risen, as he said.”

Reflection: The tomb is empty. Your desert doesn't end in silence—it ends in song. You are walking out renewed, empowered, alive.

Prayer: “Risen Savior, let Your victory shape my every day.”

Action: Celebrate today. Attend Mass. Sing. Receive the Eucharist. Let your spirit rejoice without holding back.

Fasting Focus and Suggestion: Resurrection Focus-Give up selfishness, do something generous in secret

Evening Examen: What needs to stay buried in the desert? Where do I feel new life stirring? How will I walk in resurrection?

Final Reflection: Stepping Out of the Wilderness

You have walked through silence and fire, wrestling and renewal. These forty days were not a challenge to conquer, but a space to be remade. You didn't simply observe the desert—you let it shape you.

Like Christ, who emerged from the wilderness with clarity and strength, you are now invited to step into the world differently: not busier, but bolder; not heavier, but holier.

You may not have all the answers—and that's not the point. What matters is that you've listened, repented, sacrificed, prayed, and stood still long enough for God to speak.

Religious Thought: Resurrection Begins Now

The desert journey echoes the Paschal Mystery—dying to sin, walking in silence, and rising in grace. Catholic tradition reminds us that conversion is not a moment; it's a rhythm. Daily. Ongoing. Alive.

You are called to live post-retreat life as *leaven* in your family, parish, and community. This means:

- **Bringing silence into noise**
- **Modeling mercy instead of judgment**
- **Choosing holiness over hustle**
- **Living Eucharistically—offering yourself in love**

Let the final day be less of a finish line and more of a commissioning.

“Behold, I make all things new.” — Revelation 21:5

Closing Prayer: “Lord of the Desert, Guide of the Dawn”

Lord God, You called me into the wilderness, not to punish—but to purify. You emptied my hands so You could fill my heart. In silence, You spoke. In sacrifice, You sustained. In prayer, You drew near.

Now, as I leave this sacred space, let the lessons linger like incense, let Your voice echo in my choices, and let Your love carry me where my courage falters.

Give me strength to walk the path You've placed before me— Not with fear, but with holy fire. Amen.

Commissioning Blessing: “Walk in Newness”

May the God who met you in solitude now walk with you in community. May the Spirit that stirred your heart in silence now empower your voice for justice and joy. May the grace that broke through your shadows now shine through your steps and your story.

Go forth renewed, reshaped, reawakened— A witness to resurrection in the ordinary. And may every desert you meet be transformed by your faithful feet.

You are sent. You are strong. You are loved.

How to pray the Ignatian Daily Examen

(Credit to Hallow.com with edits)

Below are five steps to notice where God is present throughout your day:

Time needed: 15 minutes

1. Prepare for prayer

Find a comfortable position. Take a few deep breaths to relax your heart and mind. Recognize the purpose of this prayer: to deepen your connection with God.

2. Thanksgiving

Begin by thanking God for the blessings of the day and anything you are grateful for.

3. Review

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you see your day clearly. Now, imagine your day like you're watching a movie in your mind. What catches your attention? Are there any specific emotions or moments that stand out to you? Any consolations—times when you felt close to God or sensed His presence at work? Or desolations—times when you felt distant from God and from who you're called to be?

4. Respond

Talk with God about what stood out from your day. What might God be telling you through your experiences and feelings? Take some time to ask for forgiveness for the times you weren't at your best. Offer more gratitude for the blessings that stood out. Whatever comes to mind, talk with God about it.

5. Look to tomorrow

What are you excited about? What are you nervous about? Visualize yourself walking through the day with God and ask for His help.

6. Close

Spend a few more moments with God, listening for Him and finding peace in His presence. Close with an [Our Father](#) and the sign of the cross.

An Examination of Conscience for Adults

(Credit to Diocese of Albany)

1. I am the Lord your God: you shall not have strange Gods before me.

- Have I treated people or things as more important than God?
- Do I give God time every day in prayer?
- Do I seek to love Him with my whole heart?
- Have I been involved with superstitious practices, or have I been involved with the occult?
- Do I seek to live by God's Word as taught by the Church?
- Have I ever received Communion in the state of mortal sin?
- Have I ever deliberately told a lie in Confession, or have I withheld a mortal sin from the priest in Confession?
- Are there other "gods" in my life? Money, security, power, people, etc.?

2. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.

- Have my words, actively or passively, put down God, the Church, or people?
- Have I used God's name in vain: lightly or carelessly?
- Have I been angry with God?
- Have I wished evil upon any other person?
- Have I insulted a sacred person or abused a sacred object?

3. Remember to keep holy the Lord's Day.

- Have I missed Mass on Sundays or Holy Days of Obligation?
- Do I avoid, when possible, work that impedes worship to God, joy for the Lord's Day, and proper relaxation of mind and body?
- Do I look for ways to spend time with family on Sunday?
- Have I tried to observe Sunday as a day of rest?
- Do I do needless work on Sunday?

4. Honor your father and your mother.

- Do I show my parents due respect?
- Do I seek to maintain good communication with my parents where possible?
- Do I criticize them for lacking skills I think they should have?
- Do I honor and obey my parents?
- Have I neglected my duties to my spouse and children?
- Have I given my family a good religious example?
- Do I try to bring peace into my home life?
- Do I care for my aged and infirm relatives?

5. You shall not kill.

- Have I harmed another through physical, verbal, or emotional means, including gossip or manipulation of any kind?
- Have I had an abortion or encouraged or helped anyone to have an abortion?
- Have I physically harmed anyone?
- Have I abused alcohol or drugs?
- Did I give scandal to anyone, leading him or her into sin?
- Have I been angry or resentful?
- Have I harbored hatred in my heart?
- Have I mutilated myself through any form of sterilization?
- Have I encouraged or condoned sterilization?
- Have I engaged in any way in sins against human life, such as artificial insemination or in vitro fertilization?
- Have I participated in or approved of euthanasia?

6. You shall not commit adultery.

- Have I respected the physical and sexual dignity of others and of myself?
- Have I been faithful to my marriage vows in thought and action?
- Have I engaged in any sexual activity outside of marriage?
- Have I used any method of contraception or artificial birth control in my marriage?
- Has each sexual act in my marriage been open to the transmission of new life?
- Have I been guilty of masturbation?
- Do I seek to control my thoughts and imagination?
- Have I viewed pornography?
- Have I respected all members of the opposite sex, or have I thought of other people as mere objects?
- Do I seek to be chaste in my thoughts, words, and actions?
- Am I careful to dress modestly?

7. You shall not steal.

- Have I taken or wasted time or resources that belonged to another?
- Have I stolen what is not mine?
- Have I returned or made restitution for what I have stolen?
- Do I waste time at work, school, and home?
- Do I gamble excessively, denying my family of their needs?
- Do I pay my debts promptly?
- Do I seek to share what I have with the poor?
- Have I cheated anyone out of what is justly theirs, for example creditors, insurance companies, corporations, government?

8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

- Have I gossiped, told lies, or embellished stories at the expense of another?
- Do I speak badly of others behind their back?
- Am I sincere in my dealings with others?
- Am I critical, negative, or uncharitable in my thoughts of others?
- Do I keep secret what should be kept confidential?
- Have I injured the reputation of others by slander?

9. You shall not covet your neighbor's spouse.

- Have I honored my spouse with my full affection and exclusive love?
- Have I consented to impure thoughts?
- Have I caused impure thoughts by impure reading, movies, television, conversation, or curiosity?
- Do I pray at once to banish impure thoughts and temptations?
- Have I behaved inappropriately with members of the opposite sex: flirting, being superficial, etc.?

10. You shall not covet your neighbor's goods.

- Am I content with my own means and needs, or do I compare myself to others unnecessarily?
- Am I jealous of what other people have?
- Do I envy the families or possessions of others?
- Am I greedy or selfish?
- Are material possessions the purpose of my life?

Before Confession:

- Prepare by making an Examination of Conscience
- A prayer before Confession:
Dear Jesus,
Help me to make a good Confession,
help me to find out my sins,
help me to be sorry for them,
help me to make up my mind not to sin again.
Have mercy on me, O Lord, and forgive me.
Mary, my mother, pray for me.

During Confession:

- Greeting: Make the Sign of the Cross in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
- Say: "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. It has been ____ (weeks, months, years) since my last confession."
- Confess your sins using the Examination of Conscience. If you are unsure of what to say, ask the priest for help. When you are finished, conclude with these or similar words: "I am sorry for these and all my sins."
- Penance: The priest will propose an act of penance. The penance might be a prayer, a work of mercy, or an act of charity. He might also counsel you on how to better live a Christian life.
- Act of Contrition: Say an Act of Contrition, expressing sorrow for your sins and resolving to leave sin behind and live more like Jesus Christ. Say:

My God, I am sorry for my sins with my whole heart.
In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good,
I have sinned against you, whom I should love above all things.
With your help, I firmly intend to do penance,
to sin no more, and to avoid whatever leads me to sin.
Our Savior, Jesus Christ, suffered and died for us.
In his name, my God, have mercy.

- Absolution: The priest then blessed you in the person of Christ as he says the prayer of Absolution which frees you from your sins.

After Confession:

- Rejoice that through the grace of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, God has reminded you of his unending love!
- Follow through with the penance the priest gave you

Individual Examination of Conscience – 7 Deadly Sins

First, take a little time to pray quietly and read through the examination of conscience below. Take as much time as necessary.

Pride: “Pride is an inaccurate perception of ourselves, an unrealistic idea of who we are not.”

Do I have a superior attitude in my thoughts, speech, or actions? Am I snobbish?

Do I display offensive or haughty behavior? Do I consider myself above others?

Do I demand recognition?

Am I always striving to be first?

Do I seek advice from others?

Am I open to accepting advice?

Am I in any way a “bully”?

Do I tend to be “bossy”?

Do I speak ill of others?

Have I lied about someone else?

Do I reveal the faults of others?

Do I place the blame on others while excusing myself?

Is there anyone I refuse to speak to?

Is there anyone I haven’t talked to in a long time?

Am I prone to arguing?

Am I offensive in my arguments?

Do I approach discussions with a superior “know-it-all” attitude?

Am I self-conscious?

Am I sensitive?

Am I easily wounded?

Envy: “Envy is a feeling of sadness that arises when we observe the good fortune of others.”

Do I feel sad about the success of my neighbors?

Am I envious of their achievements in sports or competitions?

Do I find joy in their failures?

Do I covet the wealth of others?

Sloth: “Sloth is a type of cowardice and aversion that leads us to neglect our responsibilities instead of disciplining ourselves.”

Do I have an excessive love for rest, causing me to ignore my duties?

Do I act lazily?

Am I too attached to comfort?

Do I adopt a lazy posture when responding to prayers?

Do I kneel in a relaxed manner?

Do I enjoy engaging in idle conversation?

Am I lacking fervor in my service to God?

Lust: "Lust is the desire for pleasures that contradict purity."

Have I ever desired or engaged in impure actions?

Have I found pleasure in entertaining impure thoughts or desires?

Have I read inappropriate material, listened to music with explicit lyrics, or viewed indecent images, whether in photos, on television, in movies, or on the Internet?

Have I incited sexual desire in myself or others through inappropriate kissing, embracing, or touching?

Have I engaged in impure actions alone, such as masturbation?

Do I dress immodestly or am I overly concerned with my appearance?

Do I use vulgar language or tell, participate in, or listen to inappropriate jokes or stories?

Have I entertained thoughts of adultery, even in my imagination?

Covetousness: "Covetousness is an unhealthy desire for worldly goods."

Am I using my money wisely or selfishly?

Am I fulfilling my responsibilities justly towards my fellow human beings?

Am I meeting my obligations justly towards the Church?

Gluttony: "Gluttony is an unhealthy obsession with eating and drinking."

Do I eat to live, or do I live to eat? Do I drink in excess?

Do I get drunk?

Am I misusing prescription drugs?

Am I using illegal drugs?

Have I allowed myself to become addicted to alcohol or other drugs?

Anger: "Anger is an emotion that often leads us to aggressively reject anything that hurts or displeases us.

Here are some questions to consider about my tendencies towards anger:

Am I prone to anger?

Do I find that almost anything triggers my temper?

Am I often considered "a sorehead"?

Do I struggle to suppress early signs of anger?

Do I have difficulty getting along with others?

Do I dwell on slights or injuries, even imagining them?

Do I take pleasure in the misfortunes of others?

Do I frequently think about ways to seek revenge or "get even"?

Am I argumentative by nature? Do I tend to contradict others?

Am I prone to ridiculing people, places, or things?

Am I hard to get along with?

Do I hold grudges and remain upset with certain individuals?

Do I often speak negatively about others' faults? Do I expose others' shortcomings for unworthy reasons?"

Other considerations: Am I greedy or selfish, or do I indulge in self-pity?

Am I proud or vain, or do I seek to show off?

Am I superficial and overly focused on worldly matters?

Do I crave praise by exaggerating my successes?

Am I overly sensitive, turning the slightest oversight or thoughtlessness into an insult or deliberate slight?

Have I been boastful or arrogant toward others?

Have I stubbornly defended sinful actions, whether they are my own or those of others?

Have I wasted time watching TV when I could have engaged in more constructive activities?

Am I envious of someone else's possessions, desiring them for myself?

Do I take pleasure in the misfortunes of others?

After reflecting on your sins, go to the confessional to celebrate the sacrament of Reconciliation as follows: Go into the confessional and say, ***In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Forgive me, father, for I have sinned. It has been*** (how long?) ***since my last confession and these are my sins*** (confess all your sins...be not afraid!).

Father will give you a penance and then ask you to pray the Act of Contrition. Feel free to use this one:

ACT OF CONTRITION

O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended You, and I detest all my sins because of Your just punishments, but most of all because they offend You, my God, who are all-good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of Your grace, to sin no more and to avoid the near occasion of sin. Amen.

The priest will then say the prayer of forgiveness (absolution).

If your penance was to say some prayers, please immediately go back to your seat and say your prayers.

That's it! You're forgiven!

Into the Desert: 40-Day Fasting Guide for Sacrifice, Simplicity, and Surrender (rev3)

Day	Fast Focus	Suggested Fast-You may have discerned in prayer what you need to do.
1	Physical Simplicity	Skip snacks between meals
2	Physical Simplicity	Avoid added sugar today
3	Physical Simplicity	Fast from meat today
4	Physical Simplicity	No seasoning or sauces
5	Physical Simplicity	Skip one meal and pray during that time
6	Physical Simplicity	No caffeine or stimulants (Good luck with this one)
7	Physical Simplicity	Eat only simple, whole foods (no processed items)
8	Digital Detox	No social media or news apps
9	Digital Detox	No screen time after 6 PM
10	Digital Detox	Silence notifications on your cellphone
11	Digital Detox	Fast from non-essential internet browsing
12	Digital Detox	Replace entertainment with spiritual reading
13	Digital Detox	No music during commutes or workouts
14	Digital Detox	Technology blackout for 1 hour
15	Emotional Detachment	No complaining or negativity
16	Emotional Detachment	Avoid gossip or sarcasm
17	Emotional Detachment	Do not judge, no critical thoughts, reflection before reaction
18	Emotional Detachment	Fast from defensive language
19	Emotional Detachment	No “I” statements—focus on listening
20	Emotional Detachment	Fast from self-pity or comparison
21	Emotional Detachment	Choose affirmation over cynicism
22	Distractions in Prayer	No multitasking during prayer
23	Distractions in Prayer	Create a prayer space with no distractions
24	Distractions in Prayer	Pray aloud (even briefly) to deepen focus
25	Distractions in Prayer	Journal your prayers instead of just thinking them
26	Distractions in Prayer	Begin prayer with 2 minutes of silence
27	Distractions in Prayer	No praying while moving—sit, kneel, or stand
28	Distractions in Prayer	Fast from noise: music, podcasts, videos
29	Time Reclamation	Give up one hour of TV and devote it to quiet
30	Time Reclamation	No phone until after morning prayer
31	Time Reclamation	Eliminate one unimportant task (difficult if you are OCD)
32	Time Reclamation	Plan the day with God before acting
33	Time Reclamation	Fast from instant gratification
34	Time Reclamation	No late-night scrolling
35	Time Reclamation	Choose margin over busyness (breathing room over constantly being busy)
36	Interior Disposition	Fast from control—let others lead
37	Interior Disposition	Identify and surrender one fear
38	Interior Disposition	Fast from pride—affirm someone else’s win
39	Interior Disposition	Name one recurring sin pattern—pray for deliverance
40	Resurrection Focus	Give up selfishness—do something generous in secret

Lent - 2026

Day of the Week	Date	Day
Ash Wednesday	2/18/2026	1
Thursday	2/19/2026	2
Friday	2/20/2026	3
Saturday	2/21/2026	4
Sunday	2/22/2026	Day of Resurrection-Not a penitential day
Monday	2/23/2026	5
Tuesday	2/24/2026	6
Wednesday	2/25/2026	7
Thursday	2/26/2026	8
Friday	2/27/2026	9
Saturday	2/28/2026	10
Sunday	3/1/2026	Day of Resurrection-Not a penitential day
Monday	3/2/2026	11
Tuesday	3/3/2026	12
Wednesday	3/4/2026	13
Thursday	3/5/2026	14
Friday	3/6/2026	15
Saturday	3/7/2026	16
Sunday	3/8/2026	Day of Resurrection-Not a penitential day
Monday	3/9/2026	17
Tuesday	3/10/2026	18
Wednesday	3/11/2026	19
Thursday	3/12/2026	20
Friday	3/13/2026	21
Saturday	3/14/2026	22
Sunday	3/15/2026	Day of Resurrection-Not a penitential day
Monday	3/16/2026	23
Tuesday	3/17/2026	24
Wednesday	3/18/2026	25
Thursday	3/19/2026	26
Friday	3/20/2026	27
Saturday	3/21/2026	28
Sunday	3/22/2026	Day of Resurrection-Not a penitential day
Monday	3/23/2026	29
Tuesday	3/24/2026	30
Wednesday	3/25/2026	31
Thursday	3/26/2026	32
Friday	3/27/2026	33
Saturday	3/28/2026	34
Sunday	3/29/2026	Day of Resurrection-Not a penitential day
Monday	3/30/2026	35
Tuesday	3/31/2026	36
Wednesday	4/1/2026	37
Thursday	4/2/2026	38
Friday	4/3/2026	39
Saturday	4/4/2026	40
Sunday	4/5/2026	Easter Sunday