

# **THOUGHTS FOR LENT**

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Thoughts for Lent by Ashton Oxenden

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**ASHTON OXENDEN**

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# THOUGHTS FOR LENT.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE OBJECT AND USE OF LENT.

OUR Church does well to call us aside, as it were, at this season, and give up a few weeks to a closer inquiry into the state of our souls, and a nearer approach to God. The world so enchains us, and its interests and occupations so engross us, that we need something to force itself upon us, so as to check us in our hurrying course, and induce us seriously to ask ourselves, 'Where am I? Whither am I going? Is my state right with God?'

Therefore I think our Church does well to

set apart this season as one of special discipline for her children, for the awakening of the careless, and for the deeper thoughtfulness and inward searching of her true members.

The history of Lent is this. It seems that some fixed period before the Festival of Easter has always been observed in the Christian Church. At one time the observance of it only lasted forty hours, to commemorate those hours of sadness, when our Lord, the Bridegroom of the Church, was taken from us and was laid in the grave, embracing therefore the period between His passion and resurrection, namely, the Friday and Saturday before Easter morning.

But afterwards the time was lengthened, and was extended to Forty Days. This was probably owing to the fact that Moses fasted forty days before receiving the law ; that Elias also, and the Ninevites kept the same period as a fast ; and, above all, that our Lord fasted forty days and forty nights in the wilderness



before He was exposed to Satan's temptation.

The custom of observing Lent prevailed in the Church up to the time of the Reformation. Several Christian bodies then ceased to observe it ; but the Church of England continued the practice, being fully persuaded of its great importance and usefulness ; and it still remains as a marked season in our Christian year.

But what is the chief object and purpose of Lent ? It has always been considered a time of more than ordinary strictness and devotion ; a time for acts of self-denial and humiliation before God ; for exercising more abundantly than usual every kind of charity ; for employing our spare time in visiting the sick and sorrowful, and engaging in some special work of mercy. And considering how carelessly we sometimes approach the table of the Lord, it may be looked upon as a time, above all others, for confession of sin and prayer, for fasting and watching ; so that we

may hope to come with a fuller preparation of heart to the Holy Supper of our Lord at Easter.

Now, my wish is to point out to you how you may be able to make the present season a really profitable one. I feel that among my readers there will be some who are honestly desirous to be helped on their way heavenward. Doubtless there are those who care for nothing of the kind; but there are others, who, conscious of their own weakness and shortcomings, and convinced also of the blessedness of a truly Christian course, long to be set fair on their way to a holier and better life.

I would then begin by saying, Make the present Lent *a reality*; not looking upon it merely as a recognised ordinance, which comes before you in a dry and lifeless form, when public opinion makes a sort of compromise with the world, and is content that some of its wilder enjoyments should be suspended for a certain number of weeks, whilst

others less condemned, but perhaps equally frivolous, are allowed in their stead. But make it a real time of reckoning with God, and of forwarding the work of your own salvation.

Is it a season for special *Humiliation*? Then make it so for yourself. Humble yourself before God. When you think of days gone by, or when you consider the present state of your soul, you have need, great need, to be humbled. Fall down at God's footstool. Confess your sins to Him, not merely in a general way, but one by one. Try and bring them all out before Him. And while you acknowledge yourself to be a miserable sinner, let the chastened, humbled feeling of a miserable sinner be yours. Go to Christ with a penitent heart. Bow before His cross and say, 'Lord, Thou hast dealt graciously with many a sinner, deal so with me. A broken and a contrite heart Thou wilt not despise.'

Is Lent a time for special *Self-examination*?