

This Cup We Bless

*A tea or coffee break
for every day
during Lent*



MICHAEL MCGIRR

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Contents

Introduction	2	Day 24 Friday of the third week of Lent	50
Day 1 Ash Wednesday	4	Day 25 Saturday of the third week of Lent	52
Day 2 Thursday after Ash Wednesday	6	Day 26 Fourth Sunday of Lent	54
Day 3 Friday after Ash Wednesday	8	Day 27 Monday of the fourth week of Lent	56
Day 4 Saturday after Ash Wednesday	10	Day 28 Tuesday of the fourth week of Lent	58
Day 5 First Sunday of Lent	12	Day 29 Wednesday of the fourth week of Lent	60
Day 6 Monday of the first week of Lent	14	Day 30 Thursday of the fourth week of Lent	62
Day 7 Tuesday of the first week of Lent	16	Day 31 Friday of the fourth week of Lent	64
Day 8 Wednesday of the first week of Lent	18	Day 32 Saturday of the fourth week of Lent	66
Day 9 Thursday of the first week of Lent	20	Day 33 Fifth Sunday of Lent	68
Day 10 Friday of the first week of Lent	22	Day 34 Monday of the fifth week of Lent	70
Day 11 Saturday of the first week of Lent	24	Day 35 Tuesday of the fifth week of Lent	72
Day 12 Second Sunday of Lent	26	Day 36 Wednesday of the fifth week of Lent	74
Day 13 Monday of the second week of Lent	28	Day 37 Thursday of the fifth week of Lent	76
Day 14 Tuesday of the second week of Lent	30	Day 38 Friday of the fifth week of Lent	78
Day 15 Wednesday of the second week of Lent	32	Day 39 Saturday of the fifth week of Lent	80
Day 16 Thursday of the second week of Lent	34	Day 40 Palm Sunday	82
Day 17 Friday of the second week of Lent	36	Day 41 Monday of Holy Week	84
Day 18 Saturday of the second week of Lent	38	Day 42 Tuesday of Holy Week	86
Day 19 Third Sunday of Lent	40	Day 43 Wednesday of Holy Week	88
Day 20 Monday of the third week of Lent	42	Day 44 Thursday of Holy Week. (Maundy Thursday)	90
Day 21 Tuesday of the third week of Lent	44	Day 45 Good Friday	92
Day 22 Wednesday of the third week of Lent	46	Author Biography	94
Day 23 Thursday of the third week of Lent	48		

A tea or coffee break for every day during Lent

*You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows. Ps 23*

Sometimes people think that the name of Lent comes from an old expression for slowing down, still familiar in the Latin phrase *festina lente*, meaning to 'hasten slowly'.

Hastening slowly is not a bad way to describe what Christians try to do during Lent. But the word is more likely to originate in the Old English term for spring, *Lencten*, the part of the year when days lengthen. In the northern hemisphere, Lent comes in spring. The world is bursting with life after the inward months of winter.

For once, however, the Christian season seems just as well matched to the natural world in the southern hemisphere as it does in the northern. In this part of the world, autumn is when fruit matures; it is the season of the harvest, even if, for many people in suburbia, the harvest means bringing in a few tomatoes from the vine on the back fence or the pots on the balcony. In south-eastern Australia, autumn generally brings periods of settled weather. Warm, windless days allow fruit to ripen and set. It is the time for gathering into barns, or, at least, a little bottling.

Lent is the period before Easter in which we ask ourselves what really sustains us in our lives.

It is a time for more simple living, thoughtful self-denial, reconciliation with God and others, and a focus on the basics of our lives. It is a period for taking stock and, with that, an opportunity for a garage sale of the heart. Getting rid of clutter leaves a bit of room in the soul to celebrate once again the death and resurrection of Jesus. The soul is a bit like the palate. It needs freshening up now and again so it can enjoy the different flavours life has to offer. Otherwise it becomes jaded, and another Easter can come and go with nothing but the taste of chocolate.

Lent is a time to really taste what is in the cup that life presents us.

There are quite a few cups in the story of Lent. In Mark's Gospel, when Jesus reaches the garden of Gethsemane, he is full of dread. He prays that 'this cup might pass me by.' In John's Gospel, when Jesus tells Peter to put his sword away, he asks with resignation 'Am I not to drink the cup the Father has given me?' Luke uses the same image.

At supper with his friends earlier that evening, Jesus shares a cup and says 'this is my blood of the covenant.' Later, thinking about this moment, St Paul will remind the Corinthians that the cup of blessing that they bless is a sharing in the blood of Christ. On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus asks the sons of Zebedee if they can drink from the cup he is going to face. As he died, he was forced to drink vinegar from a sponge. But as he died, Jesus could not even use a cup; a sponge had to be lifted up to his lips. The path to life was much more about giving a cup of water to even the least person.

Daily life is full of cups and mugs. They accompany us everywhere: on our desks, in the car, meeting friends, recovering from a long day, getting ready for a long day. Our cupboards are stocked of them. We probably have more than we need. They carry all sorts of messages. They survive with various chips and cracks.

This small book is an invitation to find God in the ordinary moments of every day. It is not about the World Cup, the America's Cup, the Bledisloe Cup or any other famous cup. It is about the simple cup we share in the lunchroom with a colleague at work who is struggling to get through the day. It is about the cup someone you love puts beside your keyboard as you work late into the night to meet a deadline. It is about the cup a patient friend holds to your lips when you can't manage it for yourself. These are the cups that, in the words of scripture, are really brimming over.

This Cup we Bless offers us chance to think about the cup of Jesus as we live the day that God has given us.

Each day provides suggestions for taking a few minutes with a cup of tea or coffee or anything else you prefer each day during Lent. It could just as well be used in groups.

There is a short reflection on the reading of the day.

Then a prayer.

And finally, over the whole of Lent, a chance to slowly read and spend time with the passion story in John's Gospel. It has been chosen because, in a large number of Christian communities, John's Passion is read on Good Friday every year. The other passion stories,

those of Matthew, Mark and Luke, are heard on Palm Sunday in rotation over three years. They are also wonderful, of course - each with a slightly different emphasis and point of view. All of them engage with both the humanity of Jesus and how that enables us to understand the divine. John's Gospel is elegant and reflective. It has a strong sense of community. It has mulled over the injustice of the trial of Jesus and the obscenity of his execution. It was written more than fifty years after Jesus died but, even so, it calls us to witness the horror of what Jesus went through. We do this with a sense of life's deep mystery and also with gratitude. Every Christian is called to stand at the foot of the cross. In *The Spiritual Exercises*, St Ignatius asks us just to be there with Jesus. We don't have to say much. We only need to be present.

Each day ends with a moment of quiet contemplation using a line from the Psalm of the day. Again, it simply asks us to be present to the Lord just as the Lord is present to us in good times and bad. The Lord never walks away from our pain. The Lord is always just across the table from us, listening to our story, asking if we need another cup.

*I will lift up the cup of salvation
and call on the name of the LORD. Ps 116*



ASH WEDNESDAY

(Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18)

Lent starts small. Over forty days it will grow into a movement to change the world and us with it. But at the outset it asks us to remember that we are dust. To wear ashes on our foreheads as a reminder to keep what goes on behind our foreheads in perspective. To use the colour purple in our worship, the colour of a bruise, a reminder that we are all hurt and need healing. To take a moment of honesty. To go into our private places and shut the door and to discover the God who finds us in our secret places and brings us into the light. To think about how we spend our time and energy and what really matters.

Loving God, help us to find you once again.

Our search for you asks us sometimes to be still,

*For You are all tenderness and compassion, slow to anger,
rich in graciousness.*

You call us 'fellow workers'.

May Lent renew our energy to find what matters

And to serve your kingdom of justice and peace.

Amen.

JOHN'S PASSION IN VERY SLOW MOTION.

Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

A quiet moment with a Psalm

Be still and know that I am God (Ps 46)





DAY

2

THURSDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY

(Luke 9:22-25)

Lent asks us to make choices. Today's scripture (Deut 30:15-20) shows Moses speaking to his people about their future. He says: 'See today I set before you life and prosperity, death and disaster.' He warns them against letting their hearts stray and refusing to listen. 'I set before you life or death, blessing or curse.' We are invited to 'choose life.' Yet the life we choose is not our own. The gospel tells us not to save our own life but to lose it. We are on the side of life with a capital L. All Life is sacred.

Loving God, each day calls us to make dozens of choices.

Help us to make them with wisdom and generosity.

The psalms call you the 'lover of life'. May we grow in that love.

Amen.

JOHN'S PASSION IN VERY SLOW MOTION

The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.

A quiet moment with a Psalm

*They are like trees planted
by streams of water
(Ps 1)*



FRIDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY

(Matthew 9:14-15)

Some mugs are far more beautiful than they need to be. They might even carry pictures of great paintings. They add beauty as they go about their simple task. In today's gospel, Jesus reminds us to take joy in the sheer act of living. It won't last forever. We need to celebrate the good days but also to share them. The prophet Isaiah says that if we let the oppressed go free, feed the hungry, shelter the homeless and lift burdens from all who suffer then 'your light will shine like the dawn and your wound be quickly healed over.' The way we love others will bring healing to ourselves. We are all called to paint a vibrant picture with our lives.

*Loving God, we are all works of your art**Help us to celebrate all the colours of your creation,**To create rather than complain, to wonder, not whinge.**Amen.*

JOHN'S PASSION IN VERY SLOW MOTION

He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?' Jesus answered, 'You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.' Peter said to him, 'You will never wash my feet.' Jesus answered, 'Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.' Simon Peter said to him, 'Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!' Jesus said to him, 'One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you.' For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, 'Not all of you are clean.'

A quiet moment with a Psalm

A broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise (Ps 51)



SATURDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY

(Luke 5:27-32)

There are cups that remind us that things don't always turn out the way we expect. If we look at the back of our cupboards, we are sure to find mugs from old jobs, carwash franchises that closed down, internet companies we abandoned in frustration, subscriptions we cancelled and business events we can hardly remember. Levi, the tax collector, probably expected to continue a life of dubious honesty and then retire quietly. But Jesus knew he wasn't as well as he thought he was. Even when Levi was putting on a great party in Jesus' honour, Jesus knew that the poor man was yet to discover the real meaning of celebration. People complained that Jesus spent time with such an extortionist and user. Jesus simply said that he had come to be with the sick, even if they couldn't recognise their own symptoms.

*Loving God, you ask us to follow you,**Help us to understand what that means.**Help us to take even a small leap of faith today.**Amen.*

JOHN'S PASSION IN VERY SLOW MOTION

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, 'Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord – and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.'

A quiet moment with a Psalm

Incline your ear, O Lord, and answer me (Ps 86)



FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

(Matthew 4:1-11 [Year A]/Mark 1:12-15 [Year B]/ Luke 4:1-13 [Year C])

There are mugs that are made for travelling. These days you can get ones that keep a drink hot even on a very long journey. But what about the great venturer we celebrate today? After he was baptised, Jesus experienced forty days of blind trust, led by the spirit beyond the familiar landmarks of his village and community. He was hungry and at the mercy of an alien landscape, the same wilderness in which his people wandered for forty years. Jesus experienced the otherness of the natural world. God's covenant is not just with people but with the whole earth and Jesus experienced what it was to be a small creature. He was bewildered, meaning 'taken to a wild place'. He faced the choice between darkness and light. He chose light.

Loving God, help us to recognise the rainbow you set in all our skies,

A sign of your commitment to every living creature.

May we discover you even when we lose our way.

Amen.

JOHN'S PASSION IN VERY SLOW MOTION

'Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But it is to fulfil the scripture, "The one who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me." I tell you this now, before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe that I am he. Very truly, I tell you, whoever receives one whom I send receives me; and whoever receives me receives him who sent me.'

A quiet moment with a Psalm

*Make me to know your ways, O Lord
(Ps 25)*





Michael McGirr works for Caritas Australia. He is the author of many popular books, most recently *Ideas to Save Your Life*. His other titles include *Books That Saved My Life*, *Snooze: The Lost art of sleep*, *Bypass: the story of a road*, *Things You Get for Free* and *Finding God's Traces*. He has been a regular contributor to both *Madonna* and *Australian Catholics*. His essays, reviews and short fiction have appeared in numerous places, both in Australia and overseas. He lives in Melbourne with Jenny, their three teenage children, and a dog with a large personality and equally large appetite.

*This book is dedicated with love and gratitude
to Coralie Scott who has walked every step of her road
with grace and kindness.*

This book is an invitation to drink deep, to find God in the ordinary moments of every day during Lent. It is about the cup we share in the lunchroom with a colleague to get through the day. It is about the cup someone puts beside your keyboard as you work late into the night. It is about the cup a friend holds to your lips when you can't manage it for yourself.

These are the cups which, in the words of scripture,
are really brimming over.

On the night before he died, Jesus begged,
'Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not
my will but yours be done.' As we travel through Lent,
we also accept whatever cup comes our way.
This book will help us all on our journey to new life.

*...Michael McGirr seeks paths through the ordinary
that reveal its depths, and evokes a hope to which our daily
experience points, but which lies beyond it.*

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