

*Lent 2024, Week 1 Reflection*

## CONTEMPLATION AND COVENANT

*Welcome to the Lenten audio retreat, presented by Jesuit Connections, a program of the Office of Ignatian Spirituality. Each week, we'll provide a short audio reflection written by a different alum of the Contemplative Leaders in Action program on a theme or liturgical reading from that week in Lent. We hope these clips will deepen our personal and collective preparation for Easter. Whoever you are in all your complexity, whatever you are holding today and throughout your Lenten journey, you are welcome here. And so let's pause for the next several minutes, take a deep breath, and enter intentionally into the First Week of Lent with "Contemplation and Covenant." This week's reflection was written by Amanda McCulloch, a 2023 alum of the Contemplative Leaders in Action program in Baltimore...*

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Each year at the start of Lent, I find myself asking some of the same questions: "What are my intentions for this Lenten period?" "What should I fast from this Lent?" "What 'reset' button is God asking that I push in my life?"

Recently, each year's reflection has boiled down to the same conclusion: "I will fast from [insert any not-so-lifegiving habit here] and turn my focus instead to deepening my prayer life."

What can I say - I am a creature of habit.

It is in the repetition of this intention, however, that I have been blessed with the opportunity to engage with and explore various formats of prayer, finding those that move me at this time or that. Two prayer practices that I find myself returning to again and again are Lectio Divina and contemplation, which often I find go hand in hand. I am always in awe of the movements of the Spirit that occur when practicing Lectio Divina - the slow, intentional, repetitive reading of a Scripture passage with the purpose of noticing and reflecting on the words or phrases to which God is drawing my attention. I can return to the same passage day after day and notice changes - it may be one word this time, but another phrase the next.

In praying the readings for the first week of Lent, my attention is drawn over and over again to the word and idea of 'covenant' (though truth be told, it's hard to miss - we hear it almost 10 times!) Meditation on this word transports me back to Ms. Podczaski's 9th grade theology classroom, recalling her teaching that a covenant is a solemn, unbreakable, and perpetual promise.



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This stops me in my contemplative tracks.

God cares so much for me and finds me to be so important that God makes an everlasting promise to me - a promise to always be in relationship with me, to be there when I need, to guide me in truth, to show me the path - if I take the time to stop, to ask, to listen. In fact, God loves me so much that God sent God's only Son to experience humanity - to suffer, shed blood, and die - and to be the New Covenant. When do we, as humans, ever make these kinds of promises? The last, and perhaps only time, that I have found myself ready to make a never-ending promise to another was the day 8 years ago that I married my husband.

But what does this establishment of the New Covenant in Jesus mean for me, personally? And how exactly does God show us the path? As much as I have asked God to immediately respond, to put up a billboard with the answer along with some bright, neon directional arrows to show me 'the way', God has yet to oblige my request. However, the more time that I spend with God examining my past and present, God begins, slowly and with purpose, to show me - not on my time but in God's time. I will continue to pray this Lent for the patience and steadfastness to keep showing up in prayer, to deepen my relationship with God, and to cherish the memories that God uses to show me the way.

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*Thanks for joining us for this week's reflection, presented by Jesuit Connections, a program of the Office of Ignatian Spirituality. We look forward to spending our Lenten season with you! May this audio retreat help us all prepare intentionally for Holy Week and Easter. Join us next week, when we'll ponder "Love and Parenthood."*

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### **Reflection questions:**

- *What do I seek from God this Lent? What do I hope God will teach me?*
  - *How could I show up and make time for God?*
  - *When I sit with God, what memories arise? What is God revealing to me? Where is God leading me?*
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## Opening & Closing Prayers

### ***Into the Quiet God Calls You by Liam Lawton, album Castle of the Soul***

Into the quiet God calls you,  
Calls you each by name.  
Into the quiet God calls you.  
Enter God's dwelling,  
God's Love foretelling,  
On this day of days.

### ***Uncrowd My Heart, Esther de Waal, Lost in Wonder: Recovering the Spiritual Art of Attentiveness***

Uncrowd my heart, O God,  
Until Silence speaks  
In your still, small voice;  
Turn me from the hearing of words,  
And the making of words,  
And the confusion of much speaking,  
To listening,  
Waiting,  
Stillness,  
Silence.