

*How to keep Lent*

*ADR 6158*

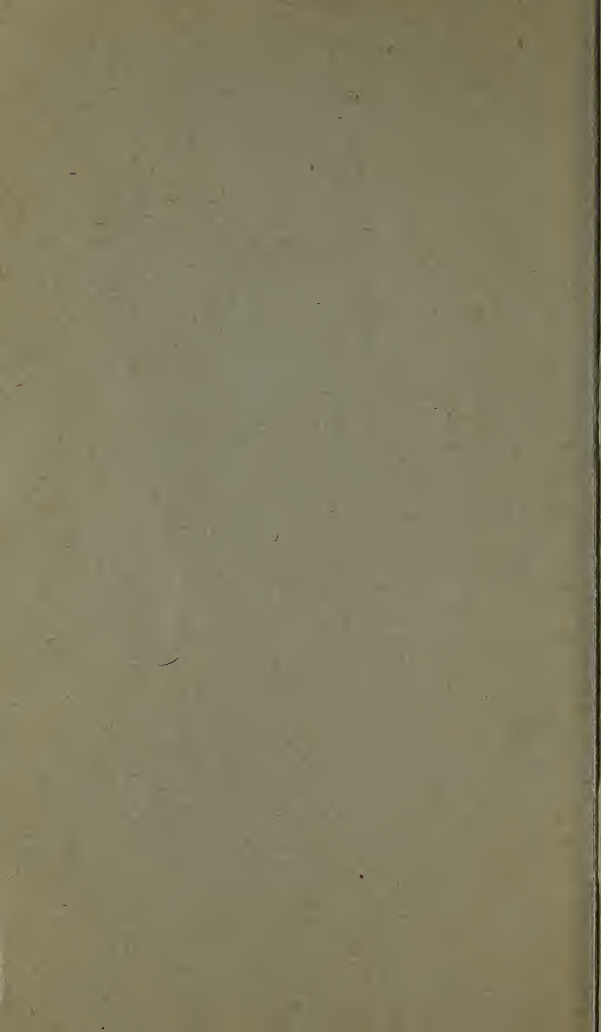
# How to Keep Lent

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*From Approved Sources*



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## THE SEASON OF LENT

**A**SH WEDNESDAY is the index to Lent. It tells us the meaning of Lent. It is not a day by itself, but the first day of a period of time, called by the Church, the acceptable time. It is the first of forty days of public penance, which is binding in a greater or less degree upon all Christians who have come to the use of reason.

The Church, usually so rich and grand in her ceremonies, on Ash Wednesday, the beginning of the day of salvation, gathers together her people for a ceremony unusually simple in its externals, yet one which contains within it depths of meaning.

On Palm Sunday of last year the Church blessed branches of palm and gave a branch to each of her children. On the first Palm Sunday the Jews bore their Lord and King in triumph into Jerusalem, and waving

palm-branches in their hands, made the streets resound again and again with their joyous hosannas. We can hardly believe it, but on Friday of the very same week the voices of these same Jews swelled the cry which raised their Lord and King on the ignominious Cross.

We, too, last Palm Sunday joined in the procession and welcomed our God and King with many "Hosannas." How many of us since then have crucified Him over again by mortal sin?

So these palms of last year are burned and reduced to ashes. And on Ash Wednesday these ashes are blessed and the Church throughout the world gathers together her children, places these ashes upon their heads and reminds them of their mortality in the memorable words used by Almighty God when He pronounced sentence of death on our first parents: "Remember, man, thou art dust, and unto dust thou shalt return."

The Church covers us with ashes in order to imprint indelibly upon our hearts those words first uttered by God Almighty

Himself, words which have not lost one jot of their force or meaning. Who dares to say he can forget his origin with impunity? How often we do forget it! How seldom we think of it! How much need in every year for such a season as Lent! This is the truth the Church by her ceremony impresses on us the opening day of Lent. "Remember, man, thou art dust and unto dust thou shalt return."

Mindful of our origin we shall not lose sight of our end. No matter how much care we may take to preserve the body, it will decay, it will return to the earth from which it was taken. In what more striking, more effective manner could the Church prepare us for the great work of Lent?

As Ash Wednesday is but the first day of Lent, of a period of time, so the warning must be in our minds and hearts during the whole of Lent. Before the altar of God we make a public act of humiliation. Humbled, we see the seriousness of our crimes and ingratitude as we have never before seen it. This disposition begets an earnest desire to do penance and live up

to the spirit of Lent; and the fulfillment of this desire leads us on to a more perfect love of God, which is the essence of perfection, the end for which we were made, and in which alone our true happiness consists both in time and eternity.

Lent calls on us to take account of ourselves before God. It calls on us to search into our souls and see how we stand before God. Lent is the acceptable time and a day of salvation to us according to the manner in which we spend it. If, during these days of public penance, God is liberal and generous towards those who even make but slight efforts, let us not forget that He is equally strict and severe with those who spend the time of Lent carelessly and indifferently, and who abuse the graces and opportunities offered to them at this holy season. Lent, then, according as we use it or abuse it, is a time of salvation or damnation. To abuse Lent is to seek eternal death.



## THE RIGHT SPIRIT

However many our practices of self-denial and sacrifice might be, they would be all quite worthless were they not animated by the right spirit. To understand what that spirit is we have but to recall the chief significance of such a season as that of Lent. The forty days are but a journey to Calvary. They lead us to the Cross. They are a meditation upon the passion and death of our Savior. Thus, yearly, the Agony and Crucifixion of our Lord are brought vividly to our mind, that we may, through love of Him, call forth that sorrow for sin which is our best expression of sympathy with the Divine Sufferer.

The spirit of Lent is, then, a spirit of repentance. Our soul is awakened to a sense of its own defects and their gravity, and to the need of an abiding interior sorrow. This spirit will manifest itself first in the active steps we take to stop sin, to avoid the occasions of sin, and to guard ourselves against falling back into sin. We cannot expect to derive any profit or spiritual benefit from

Lent unless, above all things, we put sin behind us, and set our faces, with determination, towards God and the right. This spirit will manifest itself also in outward acts of sorrow for all sins that we have committed, and, hence, the external penances of Lent.

There are Christians who resemble the barren tree of which our Lord speaks when He says: "Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?" They bring forth leaves, shadows, appearances, but no fruit. They produce even blossoms and these are their good intentions. These blossoms are forever being scattered to the ground by the winds of human respect, want of courage, attachment to the world and love of an easy-going life. There can be no good, true fruit without good works. The good works required of every Christian are comprised under fasting, almsdeeds and prayer. There is no one who cannot perform these works, particularly during the Lenten season.

## FASTING

The fast of Lent is twofold. There is a spiritual fast and a corporal fast. The spiritual fast is the fast from sin and it is the first condition for the sanctification of the corporal fast. This fast is binding on every Christian, at all times and at every period of life, but special care and watchfulness are needed to keep this fast, to avoid sin in the season of Lent.

The corporal fast of Lent is that by which we limit the amount of food we eat in accordance with the instruction issued by the Church. This fast is binding upon all Christians of the age of twenty-one to fifty-nine unless a dispensation is given by the proper authorities.

For our corporal health we will submit to anything. The doctor lays down strict rules; we submit. We swallow the bitterest of medicines. We accept without complaint the knife of the surgeon when an operation is necessary. What is there a man will not undergo to preserve life? What is there that many women will not undertake in the way of a diet for the sake of vanity?

Shall we do nothing for the eternal life of the soul? God does not ask too much. For our spiritual diseases and in order that we may have eternal life, our Divine Physician recommends us, every now and then, and for a short time, to abstain from certain kinds of food and to limit ourselves to necessity in the amount taken. If the Church did not appoint a certain time and certain days for fasting the majority of Christians would, perhaps, totally neglect this important duty. Have you ever in your lifetime appointed a fasting day for yourself?

The obligation of fasting in Lent is something serious. It is not a question of inclination. It is not a matter of choice. When the Church commands us to fast in Lent we are bound by this obligation unless legitimately dispensed.

Our Divine Lord was born in poverty and died in torments. His life was a life of humiliation, self-denial, suffering and ignominy. There was no need for Him to add fasting to His sufferings, yet He prepared Himself by fasting to preach the Gospel.

He is the leader and captain of our spiritual warfare and though invulnerable, before He encountered the tempter He prepared Himself by a rigorous fast of forty days. This was for our example, to show us how to meet the assaults of the enemy. And Holy Scripture tells us that a heavenly blessing is attached to fasting: "For then the devil left Him and angels came and ministered to Him."

It is strange that while our Lord lived a life of suffering, we His disciples shrink from the least mortification. He, the Sinless One, carried His heavy Cross on shoulders lacerated by the cruel scourge; we, full of sin, refuse even to touch the Cross. Unless we imitate His self-denial we can hardly hope to be admitted into His kingdom—"He that taketh not up his cross and followeth Me, is not worthy of Me" (Matt. x. 38).

Now the Church, in her kindly spirit of interest and thought for her children, has recognized that the rigorous observance of Lent would be too severe a task for many. The aged, the sick, the hard-working peo-

ple, are, therefore, excused from the strict fast.

There are, no doubt, many people who are not so excused, and who could, not indeed without difficulty and trial—for penance supposes these—but without any serious injury to themselves, observe the Lenten fast. Should you have any doubt as to the extent of your obligation in this respect, *you should consult your confessor.*

For the vast majority, the strict observance of Lent is not of obligation. But our Catholic instinct will tell us that if it be not within our power to observe Lent strictly, we should substitute other acts of penance that will, as far as possible, make up for the deficiency. While we cannot do all, we can do something.

Self-denial in eating and drinking is the principal form of Lenten penance prescribed by the Church. Naturally, in keeping with the Church's wish, our self-imposed acts of penance would do well to follow the same line. If we cannot keep the fast completely, can we not do so in part or on some days? If we cannot deny ourselves in the quantity

of food, can we not do so in quality and variety? If we cannot forego the necessities at table, can we not abstain from the luxuries? Each one can deny himself something. One who may be in the habit of using intoxicating drink, even though moderately, could during Lent abstain totally. Another who has a strong appetite for this or that delicacy in the line of eatables, would do well, in the spirit of penitential abstinence, to forego that delicacy completely. Or another who is accustomed to smoking could give up the practice throughout Lent.

Then there are other matters in which we can deny ourselves. For many the theater, the dance, other kinds of amusement form a strong attraction. While such things may be perfectly legitimate in themselves, the spirit of Lent would suggest we abstain from such pleasures, that the soul may be freer to devote itself to higher things.

A man's chief care ought to be turned within himself; the renunciation of self-will is a greater thing than the raising of the dead to life.—*St. Ignatius*.

Prayer without mortification is like a soul without a body, just the same as mortification without prayer is a body without a soul.—*St. Francis of Sales*.

Whilst a single passion reigns in our hearts, though all the others have been extirpated, the soul will never enjoy tranquillity.

The fruits of a good heart which God waters and nourishes with His grace, are a total forgetfulness of itself, a great love of humiliation, and a universal joy and satisfaction in everybody's good.—*St. Jane Frances de Chantal*.

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When you fast, be not, as the hypocrites, sad; for they disfigure their faces, that to men they may appear fasting. Amen I say to you they have received their reward (Matt. vi. 16).



But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thy head, and wash thy face (Matt. vi. 17).

That thou appear not fasting to men, but to thy Father, who is in secret; and thy Father, who seeth in secret, will reward thee (Matt. vi. 18).

### ALMSDEEDS

The Gospel shows us what value God sets on works of charity. These works are the standard by which He will judge all men at the last day.

St. Augustine thus explains this Gospel truth: "It is written: Redeem your sins with alms, because, in effect, our Lord loves the charitable above all things, and recompenses His elect principally in consideration of the relief they have given to the miserable. As if He should more clearly say: It is a difficult matter diligently to examine your life and use mercy towards you; nevertheless, go enter into the eternal kingdom; for I was hungry, and you gave me to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me to drink; so that the kingdom of heaven is not given to

you because you have not sinned but because you have redeemed yours sins with alms."

St. Peter of Ravenna goes a step farther: "It is an admirable thing to see how pleasing to God the relief is that is given to the poor, since that, in the kingdom of heaven, in the presence of angels, and in that great assembly of men raised from the dead, there is no mention of the death that Abel suffered, nor of the world which Noe preserved, nor of the faith that Abraham had, nor of the law which Moses gave, nor of the cross to which St. Peter was fastened, but only of the bread that is given to the poor."

The day of judgment will be a day of surprises; but the greatest surprise of all will be to see how easily we might have redeemed our sins, how easily we might have attained heaven, and how we have gone out of our way to reach hell.

"Charity covereth a multitude of sins."

Almsgiving must be the faithful companion of fasting. Persons who do not fast may give alms more liberally but almsgiving must not merely supply the place of

fasting. There is a poor-box in every church. Sometimes a special box is placed for Lenten alms. Few know of the many and varied calls made on a priest in every large city. How often the sick and poor of the parish stand in need of things and the priest has not the wherewith to supply the need.

Day by day in Lent we call on God for mercy. God is liberal to us; let us be liberal and generous with temporal goods. We ask for mercy, but we cannot hope to receive it unless we ourselves are merciful. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

Under almsdeeds come all the works of mercy. There is no man so poor who cannot perform this good work. The poor, pinched as they are by poverty often perform works of mercy. They suffer so much they have more than their share of sympathy for those in distress. When we are unable to assist the poor, the sick, the suffering with temporal goods, we have it still in our power to perform one or other of the spiritual and corporal works of

mercy. Above all we can assist them with our prayers.

St. Gregory says: "He whose heart is touched with compassion gives no less than he who exercises liberality toward the poor; for the one gives his wealth, and the other his soul, which is much more precious than all the worldly wealth."

St. Augustine says: "Of all the works of mercy with which we may obtain pardon for our sins, there is none greater or more prevalent than willingly to pardon those who have offended us."

St. Peter Chrysologus says: "Consider, brethren, that you cannot be without sin, and that you always desire your sins should be forgiven you; if, you will, then, be forgiven, you must forgive, and so know that your happiness is in your own hands, and that in pardoning others, you pardon yourselves."

St. Cæsarius says: "If you have not wherewithal to relieve the captives or clothe the naked, be at least very careful to banish out of your heart all kinds of ill-will against your neighbor. Render not to your.

enemies evil for evil; on the contrary, love them and pray for them. Living thus, ground yourself securely on the mercy and promises of God, and fear not to say to Him with confidence: Give me, O Lord, for I have given; pardon me because I have pardoned."

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Remember the word of the Lord Jesus, how He said: It is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts xx. 35).

He that hath the substance of this world, and shall see his brethren in need, and shall shut up his bowels from him; how doth the Charity of God abide in him?

My little children, let us not love in word, nor in tongue, but in deed and in truth (I John iii. 17, 18).

Give alms out of thy substance, and turn not away thy face from any poor person, for so it shall come to pass that the face of the Lord shall not be turned from thee (Tobias iv. 7).

Let each one love his brother in charity. We have each our faults. He who has to put up with his brother's fault today, will have to be borne with himself tomorrow.—*St. Alphonsus Liguori.*

### PRAAYER

Almighty God knows our wants far better than we do ourselves. Like a fond father, He has a keen sense of our miseries; but He wishes that we should be sensible ourselves of our wants and miseries and fly to Him for relief.

The helplessness of our fallen nature, our many necessities and dangers, the temptations of the devil, the world, and the flesh, are proofs of the necessity of prayer.

To avoid the occasions of sin, to frequent the sacraments, to hear the Word of God, to meditate on the eternal truths—these are so many means of keeping ourselves in a state of grace. These means, however, will be of little profit to us if we forget to pray.

At the time of confession we make a resolution to overcome such and such a

fault, or to practice such and such a virtue. At our next confession there is the same old tale of broken promises and unkept resolutions. We made the promise, certainly, and we formed the resolution, but we forgot the one important thing—we never prayed for help to enable us to keep our resolution. No wonder we failed.

To do any actual, real good, to overcome temptation, or to practice virtue, we require the actual assistance of God. It is not enough to meditate and to make resolutions; we must have the assistance of God, and God only gives this to those who pray for it. Unless we pray we shall always be unfaithful to the promises we make to God.

“We believe,” says St. Augustine, “that no one comes to be saved except by the call of God, that no one who is called works out his salvation except by the assistance of God and that no one merits this assistance except by prayer.”

Prayer is the breath of the soul. Just as breathing is the sign of life, so is prayer the sign of life in the soul. The soul like the body requires food. Grace is the food

of the soul. Without grace the soul cannot live and without prayer grace cannot ordinarily be obtained! "Ask and you shall receive; seek and you shall find."

We may sum up the necessity of prayer very briefly. A man who prays will be saved, and the man who does not pray will be lost.

We require no grand language when we pray, when we wish to address God. When we pray let us speak to God as a child to his father. How different is the Lord's Prayer from all of human composition! Yet He Who composed the prayer had infinite knowledge. It is so simple a child can understand every word of it. It is the most perfect model of prayer and contains in itself all the prayers ever composed by man. St. Augustine says: "If you run through all the words of other prayers you will find nothing in them that is not contained in the Our Father.

We must pray with humility for God resists the proud and gives His grace only to the humble.

We must pray with attention, for prayer



is the raising up of the mind and heart to God. We cannot help distractions but we can prevent our minds resting on them. To pray with wilful distraction is to receive nothing and to offend God.

We must pray with confidence. We must pray with perseverance. God's graces cannot be valued. Our conduct as a rule is not such as to induce God to give us His gifts when we first ask for them. A gift so easily given might be lightly valued and easily lost. We often have to ask, time after time, for some gift from an earthly father. When we do receive it we appreciate it all the more.

St. Bernard says: "Prayer gives strength to fasting and fasting obtains grace to pray."

St. Jerome says: "By fasting the vices of the body are cured and by prayer the infirmities of the soul."

What we want most in Lent is sorrow for sin. Prayer is especially useful to obtain this sorrow. Prayer is one of the works of Lent and under the good work of prayer are comprised all the exercises of religion

and piety. We do not adequately perform the work of prayer in Lent, if we simply confine ourselves to oral prayer.

How many there are, for example, who could consecrate this time by hearing Mass daily. What greater incentive to good living, what more powerful help against the temptations that surround us could there be than that union of our soul with Jesus Christ in the sacred offering of His Body and Blood? How many there are, too, who could make the Mass, as it were, more intimate and more complete for themselves by the frequent, yea—as our Holy Father has recommended—the daily reception of Holy Communion.

Besides Holy Mass the Church has many devotions of a special character throughout Lent; the preaching of sermons, the Stations of the Cross, and others peculiar to the season. We should make it our business to be present at these, that our spirit, in its work of penance, may not lag, but that it may grow and advance in contrition and love. Make Lent in very truth a time of devotion and meditation.

At home read again and again the account of Our Lord's Passion as it is found in the Gospels; read a good Life of Christ; read spiritual books such as the *Imitation of Christ*. Read and think upon these things and your soul will be in thorough keeping with the spirit of Lent. It will be awakened and refreshed and encouraged.

Ponder these suggestions for the keeping of Lent and come to some definite practical conclusions. For instance:

Recognize and admit your soul stands in need of penance.

Determine upon some particular practices of self-denial.

Decide upon some devotions and prayers beyond your ordinary ones.

Be faithful in adhering to these practices and devotions throughout the whole season of Lent.

Lent will be for you, then, not a mere word or name, but it will be, as it is meant to be, a time of spiritual profit and spiritual growth. Even though the penitential practices you engage in may be distasteful to human nature, they will be a source of

supernatural gladness. For, through them, you will be united with Jesus Christ in His sufferings, His passion and death, and you will be brought to experience, as you could not otherwise, the real joy of Easter.

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However great may be the temptation, if we know how to use the weapon of prayer well, we shall come off conquerors at last; for prayer is more powerful than all the devils. He who is attacked by the spirits of darkness needs only to apply himself vigorously to prayer and he will beat them back with great success.—*St. Bernard.*

God will grant all that thou askest for in prayer, provided it be expedient; if it be not expedient, He will bestow something more conducive to thy welfare. He best knows how and when to supply thy wants. When, through ignorance, thou askest for what is not beneficial, it is better thy petition should not be granted.—*Ven. Blosius.*

## LENTEN PRACTICES

The first thing we should consider before undertaking any special practices for Lent is the fulfillment of our daily obligations to the best of our ability and according to our state in life.

### DEVOTIONAL

1. If possible, hear Mass every day and receive Holy Communion daily. At least receive Holy Communion every Sunday during the Lenten season.

2. Visit the Blessed Sacrament once a day. This can be done on the way to work, during lunch hour or after work in the evening.

3. Attend the special Lenten devotions in your parish church.

4. Make the Stations of the Cross every day.

5. Say the Rosary (five decades) every day.

6. Say indulgenced aspirations occasionally during the day. A number are included in this pamphlet.

7. Spend fifteen minutes a day in spiritual reading. A list of appropriate books and pamphlets is given in this brochure.

### PENITENTIAL

1. Stop smoking during Lent.
2. Refrain from alcoholic beverages of all kinds.
3. Do not attend the theater.
4. Do not dance.
5. Stop eating a particular food or delicacy.

### INDULGENCED ASPIRATIONS

The Sign of the Cross—Every time it is made invoking the Blessed Trinity with the words "In the name of the Father," etc.

*50 days' Indulgence.*

If the Sign of the Cross is made with Holy Water.

*100 days' Indulgence.*

Acts of Faith, Hope and Charity—Every time they are said with devotion.

*7 years and 7 quarantines.*

My Jesus, mercy!

*300 days each time.*

Eternal Father, I offer Thee the precious blood of Jesus in satisfaction for my sins, and for the wants of Holy Church.

*100 days each time.*

Blessed and praised every moment be the most holy and divine Sacrament.

*100 days once a day.*

O sacrament most holy! O sacrament divine!

All praise and all thanksgiving be every moment thine.

*100 days, once a day.*

Sacred Heart of Jesus, I trust in Thee.

*300 days each time.*

Jesus, meek and humble of heart, make my heart like unto thine.

*300 days, once a day.*

Blessed be the holy and Immaculate Conception of the most blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God.

*300 days each time*

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O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee.

*100 days each time.*

Mother of love, of sorrow and of mercy, pray for us.

*300 days each time.*

Our Lady of Lourdes, pray for us.

*300 days each time.*

St. Joseph, foster father of our Lord Jesus Christ and true spouse of Mary ever Virgin, pray for us.

*300 days once a day.*

St. Joseph, friend of the Sacred Heart, pray for us.

*100 days, once a day.*

Angel of God, my guardian dear,  
To whom His love commits me here,  
Ever this day be at my side,  
To light and guard, to rule and guide.

*100 days each time.*



## READING LIST\*

### Pamphlets

- How to Keep Lent.*  
*Why a Lenten Season?*  
*Lent, Its Meaning and Purpose.*  
*The Mystery of Suffering.*  
*Selected Prayers for Lent.*  
*A Thought a Day for Lent.*  
*A Thought a Day for Lent for Children.*  
*Stations of the Cross.*  
*Stations of the Cross for Children.*  
*Ceremonies of Holy Week.*  
*The Three Hours' Agony.*  
*Christ's Last Agony.*  
*Jesus Crucified.*  
*The Resurrection.*  
*Little Canticles of Love.*  
*Prayers to the Blessed Sacrament.*  
*Prayers to the Blessed Virgin.*  
*Prayers to St. Joseph.*  
*Prayers to St. Ann.*  
*Prayers to St. Anthony.*  
*Prayers to the Little Flower.*  
*Prayers to the Sacred Heart.*  
*Prayers for the Dead.*  
*Ordinary of the Mass.*

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\*These books and pamphlets may be ordered direct from  
 The Paulist Press.

### Books

The Bible (The History of the Passion and Death of our Lord in the Gospels).

*The Imitation of Christ*, Thomas à Kempis.

*A Primer of Prayer*, McSorley.

*The Life of Our Lord*, Fouard.

*The Eternal Galilean*, Sheen.

*Lives of the Saints*, Butler.

*Christ in the Christian Life*, Burke.

*Christ In Us*, Burke.

*The Spiritual Life*, Elliott.



