



# SERMON @ SAINT MARY'S

Preacher: Corey Spence

March 9, 2025

1st Sunday in Lent

Luke 4:1-13

Please Pray with me:

Lord, oil the hinges of our heart's doors that they may swing gently and easily to welcome your coming. Amen. — New Guinea Christian Prayer

Unlike Christmas and Epiphany, which take place on the same dates every year, Easter is a moveable feast based on the lunar calendar. Therefore, all other observances dependent upon Easter, including Lent and Pentecost, shift in relation to the timing of Easter Sunday. Because Easter Sunday is April 20 in 2025, Ash Wednesday was March 5 ~ forty days before Easter minus Sundays.

Claudia Frances Ibotson Hernaman's hymn, "Lord, who throughout these forty days," signals the beginning of Lent and is often sung during Ash Wednesday services or throughout the season of Lent. Forty is a number with special biblical significance. It rained for forty days and nights when the earth was overtaken by floodwaters, and Noah waited another forty days before opening the window of the Ark. Israel wandered in the desert for forty years. Jesus was seen on earth following the resurrection for forty days. In this case, Christ's forty days in the wilderness provides the primary paradigm for the forty days of Lent.

Claudia Hernaman (1838-1898) was born in Surrey, England, and died in Brussels, Belgium. She was the daughter of an Anglican minister, and she married a minister who also served as a school inspector. Like so many other women hymn writers of the nineteenth century, she was devoted to the religious education of children. Toward this end, she wrote 150 hymns in several collections, some original and some translated from Latin.

"Lord, Who Throughout These Forty Days" appeared first in her *Child's Book of Praise; A Manual for Devotion in Simple Verse* (1873). It was not included in hymnals, however, until the mid-twentieth century, when it appeared in the *Irish Church Hymnal* (1960) and *Hymns for Church and School* (1964). By the 1970s, "Lord, who throughout these forty days" was a standard hymn in most hymnals in the United States. It is based on the account of the temptation of Jesus found in three Gospels ~ Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13.

As is the case with many hymns, Christ's life becomes a model for how his followers should confront temptation. The first two lines of the stanzas focus on a response of Christ when he faced

temptation; the last two lines encourage Christians to model their behavior on Christ's example. This is a familiar pattern for children's hymns from the days of Isaac Watts. It obviously strikes a chord with adult believers as well. This hymn mirrors today's Gospel and the classic themes of the Lenten season are presented in its stanzas.

### **Fasting and Prayer**

Lord, who throughout these forty days,  
For us did fast and pray,  
Teach us with you to mourn our sins,  
And close by you to stay.

Following his baptism in the Jordan River and was led into the wilderness full of the Holy Spirit. Waiting there was forty days of prayer, temptation, and fasting. Jesus went from the incredible height of being declared the Son of the Most High God into the depths of loneliness and hunger. How often do our own lives move from the highs to the lows? Sometimes it seems the world waits for us to be on top of the mountain only to topple us. If we mourn our failings and turn to Jesus for help we have a companion in our pilgrimage through the valley.

### **Struggle with Satan and sin**

As you with Satan did contend,  
And did the vict'ry win,  
O give us strength in you to fight,  
In you to conquer sin.

Jesus overcame the struggle against sin and we know that in him we have an advocate and example to help us when we forget to love ourselves and others as much as Christ loves us. When we are tempted to do things that harm others in thought, word, and deed, we can look to him to remind us that the most important thing in life is to love God with all our heart, mind, and strength, and to love others as ourselves.

### **Dying to self, meditation on scripture**

As you did hunger bear and thirst,  
So teach us, gracious Lord,  
To die to self, and always live  
By your most holy word.

One of my favorite collects is for Proper 28, which is usually said in November: Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

We are reminded in God's most holy word that God is love and all who live in love, live in God. Let us spend our lives not hoarding all we have, building bigger barns to store all we gain, and shutting ourselves off from the world. Let us spend our time emptying ourselves in sharing empathy and love for the world around us crying out for relief. By sharing all we are as a parish family with the world around us and inviting everyone we know to join the community we are building at 24 Broadway.

### **Penitence**

And through these days of penitence,  
And through your Passion-tide,  
Forevermore, in life and death,  
O Lord, with us abide.

When we make mistakes and hurt others intentionally or not, let us find the time to go back and ask for forgiveness. Let us remember to confess that we have sinned against God and others in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. That we have not loved God with our whole heart; and we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. Jesus knows it all: what it is to be tempted, to question why life is the way it is, the pain of utter loss and loneliness. He is with us in the muck of life when we feel all is lost and he is with us when life is bright and shiny and we are on top of the world.

### **Looking toward the joy of Easter**

Abide with us that when this life  
Of suffering is past,  
An Easter of unending joy  
We may attain at last!

As we look toward the future, we ask Jesus to be with us – in the words of Grange ritual – “that when we are called to lay down our implements on earth may we enter that paradise, eternal in the heavens.” That time when we leave this mortal coil and its pain and loss and death. That time when we lay down our trophies before the cross and enter into the joy of heaven – that eternal easter day – and receive – in the words of the Grange Chaplain – “that welcome plaudit, well done thou good and faithful servant.”

An active writer, Hernaman had among her publications the Anglo-Catholic Altar Hymnal: A Book of Song for Use at the Celebration of the Holy Eucharist, 1884 (coeditor), The Crown of Life: Verses for Holy Seasons (1886), The Conversion and Martyrdom of St. Alban: A Sacred Drama (1891). She edited the anthology, Lyra Consolationis: From the Poets of the Seventeenth, Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries (1890).

“Lord, who throughout these forty days” is the only hymn by Hernaman that is commonly sung today. Because there are very few hymns that encompass the entire period of Lent and take us to

Easter, it fills a needed gap in the hymn repertoire and starts us off on the journey toward Holy Week and Easter. May it accompany us in this time of penitence and self-reflection when in the words of our opening hymn we are reminded that: We walk the road, Lord Jesus, that you trod Knowing ourselves baptized into your death So we are dead and live with you in God. Amen.

With profound thanks to  
UMC Discipleship History of Hymns  
[tinyurl.com/Lord40Days](https://tinyurl.com/Lord40Days)