

Lent 2026

Reflection

*Rend your hearts, not your garments
and return to God, your God. (Joel 2:13)*

The season of Lent is upon us once again, and once again we are invited to rend our hearts and return to God. What does this actually mean? How do we rend our hearts? Why return to God? Have we been away?

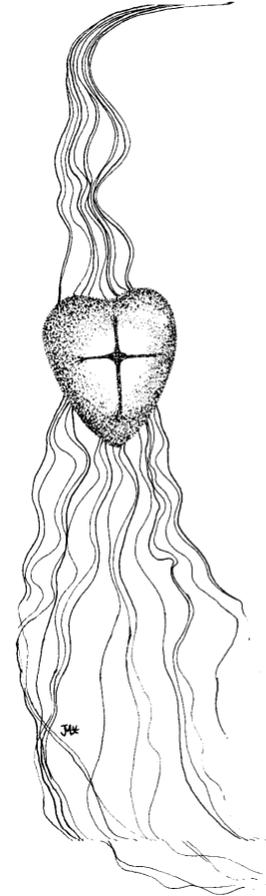
Let's first consider what it means to rend our hearts and not our garments. When this verse was written, it was customary to tear one's garments as a sign of mourning or remorse, but the prophet Joel is advising us to do more than tear our clothing. He is telling us to break open our hearts to God in a deeper way, to convert our hearts more faithfully to conform to God's will. To convert is to change and, in this case, to repent.

The original meaning of repent was to turn around, to change course, to re-turn. So when we repent of our sins during Lent, we are really returning to God; we are changing course from separating ourselves from God to reuniting with God. In fact, all of us at times have been away from God and need to return, for all of us are sinners.

In his World Day of Peace Message, Pope Leo XIV made reference to this when he wrote of narratives in which we forget God's grace even though it's always present in our hearts. We forget because our hearts are wounded by sin.

As a way to heal, Pope Leo cited St. Augustine who urged us to listen and engage in dialogue with one another. He also cited Pope Francis who presented the model of St. Francis of Assisi, il poverello, for becoming one with the poor and for living in harmony with all. And Pope Leo noted what Pope John XXIII wrote regarding peace; that is, the need to banish fear and anxiety and to trust. He added that we must be trustworthy, practice justice and forgiveness, and work in community.

All this leads to new questions as we strive to "rend our hearts and return to God." In this very divided society in which we are living, do we listen? Are we willing to dialogue with those who differ from us? How well do we empathize with the poor, and what are we doing to end poverty rather than to blame the poor for their plight? Are we living in harmony not just with family and friends, but also with co-workers or classmates, neighbors and strangers, people of different races, nationalities, sexual orientation and immigrant status? Do we live in harmony with nature? Are we willing to trust others and forgive their faults and offenses? Are we, ourselves, trustworthy? Are we just, not catering to some and neglecting those we judge unworthy for no reason other than our own prejudices, or are we fair to all as our God is to us? Do we recognize that we are stronger and more productive when we work together instead of egotistically thinking we can do it all individually? Ultimately, do we love God above all else, our neighbors as ourselves, and even our enemies?



Prayer from “Create in Me a Clean Heart” in *Out of the Ordinary* by Joyce Rupp

*Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And put a new and right spirit within me. (Psalm 51:10)*

Create in me a clean heart, open and receptive, so that I may embrace the many ways you choose to visit my life.

Create in me a clean heart, cleansed of anxiety and lack of trust, restoring in me an enduring faith in your abiding presence and unconditional love.

Create in me a clean heart, scrubbed of racism and prejudice, drawing me toward all as my sisters and brothers.

Create in me a clean heart, washed with your mercy and strengthened by your love, helping me move beyond whatever keeps me from union with you.

Create a clean heart in me, God. Dust off the unmindful activity that constantly collects there. De-clutter my heart from harsh judgments and negativity. Wash away my resistance to working through difficult relationships. Rinse off my un-loving so the beauty of my generous and kind heart can shine forth. Remove whatever keeps me from following in your compassionate footsteps. Amen.

Suggested Actions

Please spend some time with this reflection. Also consider doing the following:

- ❖ Read the complete World Day of Peace Message of Pope Leo XIV at <https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/messages/peace/documents/20251208-messaggio-pace.html>
- ❖ Pray the prayer above, perhaps everyday through Lent.
- ❖ Consider the questions in the reflection above. Which do you need to work on? Make a concerted effort this Lent to work on it, remembering that that is the way to mend our hearts and not our garments, to return to God.
- ❖ Join the 44th Good Friday Way of the Cross organized by Pax Christi Metro New York on April 3rd beginning at 8:30 AM at Dag Hammarskjold Plaza, E. 47th St. between 1st and 2nd Avenues across from Holy Family Church. Process with them across Manhattan, ending near Holy Cross Church around noon.
- ❖ Visit the Pax Christi websites for more ways to pray, study, and act: www.paxchristinys.org and www.nypaxchristi.org.
- ❖ Share this reflection with others.