

The Ultimate Guide  
*to Lent*



*Table of* ✨

---

# *Contents*

---

*05* THE WAGES  
OF SIN

{ welcome week }

*08* DON'T FORGET

{ reminders on the  
dates & rules for lent }

*10* PEACE  
& QUIET

{ mindfulness meditation  
for catholic families }

*20* SET THE  
MOOD

{ decorate for a  
life-changing lent }

*27* HUGS  
FROM GOD

{ a story of hope }

34 THE  
CALLING OF  
ST. MATTHEW

{ visio divina }

44 SURPRISE  
& DELIGHT  
OTHERS

{ secret service }



# *The Wages of Sin*

{ welcome week }

---

BY DOMINICK ALBANO

*“For the wages of sin is death...”*

In his letter to the Romans, St. Paul reminds us that not only will we die, but sin is the reason for that death. The season of Lent is upon us. A season of penitence. A time to remember that we are dust, and to dust we shall return.

Welcome to *The Ultimate Guide to Lent!* Every year, thousands of Catholics use this guide to experience a truly life-changing Lent. We are

excited to be back again this year, helping you along your Lenten journey. Every Sunday during Lent, you'll receive a new issue in your inbox that contains inspiring articles, challenges and invitations to prayer.

*In each Ultimate Guide you'll find:*

---

### **A FEATURE STORY**

Sometimes inspiring, sometimes fun, sometimes a little bit of both, these stories address Lenten themes and will help you experience Lent like never before.

### **A STORY OF HOPE**

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (John 1:5). These stories remind us that even in the darkest times, God is there and moving for our benefit.

### **PEACE & QUIET**

These guided meditations are designed for families with young children. They'll provide an opportunity for you to take a moment away from the hustle and bustle of daily life to rest, relax and focus on God.

## VISIO DIVINA

You've probably heard of *Lectio Divina*—praying with and meditating on the written word. *Visio Divina* invites us to pray and meditate on sacred art.

We pray that you will be able to enter into Lent more fully than ever before. Be sure you share *The Ultimate Guide to Lent* with your friends and family, follow us on Facebook and Instagram **@catholicAOC** and **@thecatholictelegraph** and reach out to share with us how *The Ultimate Guide* has helped you this Lenten season!



## *Don't Forget*

{ quick reminders on dates & rules for lent }

---

### *What is Lent?*

A liturgical season marked by prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

### *What is the purpose of Lent?*

Lent is a period of preparation to celebrate the Lord's Resurrection at Easter.

### *Dates*

Ash Wednesday, February 22 through  
Holy Thursday, April 6



*Easter*

Sunday, April 9

*Solemnity of St. Joseph*

Monday, March 20

*Solemnity of the Annunciation*

Saturday, March 25

*Fasting*

Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. For most Catholics, this means you are permitted to eat one full meal, as well as two smaller meals that together are not equal to a full meal.

*Abstinence*

Ash Wednesday and all Fridays during Lent. For most Catholics, this means abstaining from eating meat.

*Liturgical color*

Purple



## *Peace & Quiet*

{ mindfulness for catholic families }

---

Catholic Mindfulness is like taking the spiritual classic, *The Practice of the Presence of God* by Brother Lawrence and living it rather than reading it.

It's a chance to focus on the present moment. With young families, it's easy to focus on "what's next"—the practices, the projects, the grades... but Jesus tells us in Matthew 6:34, "Do not worry about the things of tomorrow. Today has enough worries of its own."

Take a look at your calendar and find 15 minutes daily to set aside for you and your family to practice a little mindfulness. This is a great way to pray as a family throughout your Lenten Journey.

We've written this activity to be led by mom or dad, but it can just as easily be adapted for others such as aunts, uncles, grandmas, grandpas or beloved guardians.

### **PREPARING YOUR SPACE**

Gather the whole family in a common space in your home. Try to avoid technology—which can be a source of distraction—and bedrooms, as kids might think meditation is just a good excuse to take a nap!

Have each kid grab a pillow, carpet square, or something similar to sit on. Try to avoid anything large that will become a distraction (like a blanket) and make sure everyone spreads out. This should help kids stay in their space during the meditation.



the seed sown  
on rich soil  
is the one  
who hears  
the word and  
*understands it*

The whole family should sit comfortably in their own space, but criss-cross applesauce on the floor is the rule of thumb.

Mom or dad should ask everyone to close their eyes, then, lead the family through six deep breaths.

Teach everyone how to breathe in for a count of six, hold the breath for a count of four, then breathe out for a count of four.

---

*Begin with the sign of the cross.*

**READ**

*The adult should read aloud. Read slowly, calmly and clearly.*

“On that day, Jesus went out of the house and sat down by the sea. He spoke to them at length in parables, saying: “A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky ground, where it had little soil. It sprang up at once because the soil was not deep, and when the sun rose it was scorched,

and it withered for lack of roots. Some seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it. But some seed fell on rich soil, and produced fruit, a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold.

The seed sown on the path is the one who hears the word of the kingdom without understanding it, and the evil one comes and steals away what was sown in his heart.

The seed sown on rocky ground is the one who hears the word and receives it at once with joy. But he has no root and lasts only for a time. When some tribulation or persecution comes because of the word, he immediately falls away.

The seed sown among thorns is the one who hears the word, but then worldly anxiety and the lure of riches choke the word and it bears no fruit.

But the seed sown on rich soil is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold.” Matthew 13:1-8,19-23

## **SAY**

Imagine being one of those seeds on the path. The birds came and ate them up. Sometimes, life is full of upsetting things.

Quietly shake away all the upsetting things in your life right now. Shake your arms and your head. Run your hands through your hair. Keep your eyes closed and shake away everything for 10 seconds.

*(Count down slowly from 10 to one.)*

*And relax.*

Now imagine being one of those seeds who lands on rocky ground. You're trying to grow but you can't! Sometimes we need God's help to do the smallest things.

Lay down on your back. Raise one of your hands up off the ground, feel how heavy it is, then let it drop. Raise your other hand, feel its weight, then let it drop. Raise one of your legs as high as it will go, now let it drop. Now raise your other leg, feel how it hangs up in the air. Now let it drop.

*Sit back up and relax.*

Imagine being one of those seeds that lands among the thorns. Not everything in the world is helping you become the best version of yourself. Being good can be hard when you feel pressure from the world around you.

Give yourself a big hug and squeeze as tight as you can. Scrunch up your face, close your eyes tight, squeeze your toes and clench your fists. Squeeze, squeeze, squeeze as hard as you can for five seconds.

*five*



*four*



*three*



*two*



*one*

*b r e a t h e  
and relax.*



Now let's do it again. Squeeze for five seconds  
as tight as you can.

*five*



*four*



*three*



*two*



*one*

*let go  
and relax.*

Now let's do it one last time. Squeeze as tight as you can.

*five*



*four*



*three*



*two*



*one*

*now*

*r e l a x*

Now imagine being that seed that falls on good soil. You are surrounded by your loving family and you know how much God loves you.

Keep your eyes closed, stand up, reach up to the sky, and grow as tall as you can. Reach, reach, reach up to God, just like a seed that is growing up towards the sun. Reach for God, and know just how blessed you are.

Now stop reaching. Stand still.

*Open your eyes.*

Whenever you hear the parable of the sower, I want you to remember how much your family loves you and how much God loves you. No matter what the world is trying to throw at you, no matter what kinds of problems you're facing, you can always take a deep breath and remember that it's going to be okay. You are in good soil.

*Close with the sign of the cross.*



## *Set the Mood*

{ decorate for a life-changing lent }

BY JESSICA RINAUDO

Decorating for the seasons is part of many people's lives. We decorate the tree and hang stockings at Christmas, perhaps set some pumpkins and spider webs out in October, or even fill our spaces with tulips and bunnies at Easter. But have you ever thought about decorating for Liturgical seasons like Lent?

This might seem like a strange concept, after all Lent is typically a time when we are focusing on fasting, penance and almsgiving, not decorating our spaces. But hear me out. Sometimes visual reminders can signal to us that it's time to stop and pray, or make a point to give to others.

In my previous job, we kept a stocked candy bucket in a common space throughout the year. But during Lent, we draped a purple cloth over it. It was a small visual reminder that we were in a time of sacrifice.

I've put together some ways to decorate your living space for Lent. Each option is designed to help you remember that Ash Wednesday declaration—you are dust, and to dust you shall return—as well as help you focus on the three Lenten tenets of prayer, fasting and almsgiving.



## DECORATE YOUR MANTLE

We hang our stockings on the mantle at Christmas, and I've seen many a hearth adorned with fall leaves and pumpkins during autumn. Consider transforming this central part of your home into a space filled with Lenten reminders.

*Remember you are dust...*

- Black or gray tulle (\$3.99 / yard)

*...And to dust you will return*

- Clock (\$21.99)
- Decorative skull (\$27.95)

## *Hope in the Resurrection*

- Black candle holders (\$6.49 each)
- Crucifix (\$23.99)



## WALL MIRROR DECOR

Set aside a dedicated space to place extra change or dollars for almsgiving. This mirror shelf even has hooks for hanging your rosary, reminding you to pray!

### *Almsgiving & Prayer*

- Wood wall mirror with hooks (\$39.99)
- Mary Undoer of Knots Wood Rosary (\$17.95)





## KITCHEN REMINDERS

Although fasting can encompass a variety of sacrifices, many gravitate toward giving up food items. And meatless Fridays may mean we need an extra reminder to abstain while we're wandering through our kitchens.

- Purple tulle (\$1.69 / yard)

Cover up the temptations! But buy this fabric to peek through and remember your sacrifice.

- Religious magnet (\$7.97)

Place them at eye level or by the fridge handle.





## COMMON SPACE STATIONS

These Stations of the Cross can be prayed together as a family. Consider attaching them to your wall, much like the Stations would be presented in a church. As you walk past them, take a moment to pray at least one!

- [Stations of the Cross Printables \(\\$10\)](#)
- [Use poster tacky \(\\$5.17\)](#)

## HAVE MORE IDEAS ON HOW WE CAN DECORATE FOR LENT?

Share them at [@thecatholictelegraph](#) on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).



# *Hugs from God*

{ a story of hope }

---

BY PETE BEERSE

So many times, when my despair weighs me down, I turn to God in simple prayer and ask Him for a hug. Though truthfully, more times than not, it is God who reaches out to me and initiates the hugs without me ever asking. I believe He does this because He sees our struggles, feels our pain, and deeply desires to comfort us.

In 2012, I was paralyzed in a freak accident when a porch swing broke. Then in 2015, our family experienced the tragedy of our son Mark's

unexplainable suicide. Throughout this difficult journey, I've kept an ongoing list of occurrences entitled "Hugs from God." I review this list often as a kind of scrapbook of the invisible hand of God accompanying me.

Years ago when Mark was beginning high school, a friend of ours from church approached him about helping her do various outdoor tasks on her small farm. From that moment on, Mark and her family developed a special bond and he looked forward to spending time working for her. Like so many of us, her grief over the sudden loss of Mark was immense.

As the one year anniversary of Mark's death approached, it was difficult not to experience and relive the anguish all over again. In the midst of this period, our friend called to tell us she needed to share an amazing story with us. I asked her if she would write down what happened so I could add it to my Hugs from God list.

**SHE GRACIOUSLY DID SO,  
AND IT FOLLOWS:**

“The grief of the anniversary of Mark’s death was overwhelming. Struggling to process, I wasn’t able to finish a garden we had been working on. I was just frozen. I couldn’t do it.

The day he died he was [supposed] to be on my farm finishing the garden. His blank check was on the counter, his tools were still in the garden from the Sunday before. All the memories, the pain, the questions, the love and friendship we shared, all mixed together into this frozen state.

I felt I couldn’t go on without him, I couldn’t go into the garden, let alone finish it. Self-talk didn’t work, rationalization didn’t work. [I was] drowning in self-pity and grief.

That Friday night I sat on the deck and prayed. I talked to God. I talked to Mark. I prayed and cried. I drank a beer.

Then [it dawned on me]. Jesus cried and prayed and felt despair in the garden.

Then [it dawned  
on me]. Jesus cried  
and prayed and  
*felt* despair in the  
garden.

He talked to God, His father. Maybe I could take Him with me.

I went and got my tools. I stepped into the garden. I still felt the despair, still felt frozen. I started to hoe the weeds. I hoed and hoed. My hoe hit something. I walked under a large hosta plant and stepped on something.

I bet Mark left another tool here that wasn't picked up, I thought.

Bending down, half buried in the earth was... a pair of angel wings.

Sudden relief, love [and] understanding came over me. I got on my knees and, laughing, thanked God for giving me back to myself, for showing me that the grief was mine to release. Mark was fine and in God's care now.

It was confirmation of God's grace, love and understanding. A miracle?

All I know is that I am no longer frozen.”



The picture is the set of stone angel wings she found. She had never seen them before and has no idea where they came from.

It'd be very easy to assume that the way this story unfolded is mere coincidence and any profound meaning is simply wishful thinking. Yet, I have no doubt this was another hug from God to let us feel His consolation.

WRITTEN BY PETE BEERSE

---

Pete Beerse and his wife, Lisa, are parishioners of St. Philip the Apostle (Morrow) and St. Francis DeSales (Lebanon) Family of



Parishes. They are joyful parents of eight children and six grandchildren (with another two expected this summer). Prior to Pete's injury in 2012, he worked in R&D at Procter and Gamble and kept busy with his children's activities and volunteer work in his parish. He is part of a vibrant weekly Catholic men's group and has recently joined the Development Advisory Committee of UC's Catholic Bearcat.

---

*visio divina*





# *The Calling of St. Matthew*

{ visio divina }

---

BY EMMA CASSANI

You may have heard of *lectio divina*, “divine reading,” where we read and pray through scripture. *Visio divina* is similar, but means “divine seeing.” When practicing *visio divina*, we look at and pray through sacred art.

In college, I took a few art history classes and immediately fell in love with the way I could learn so much about the world simply by looking at a piece of art. For me, art is its own beautiful, powerful language.

The language of art can be cultivated and expanded with knowledge and practice. Each week this Guide will provide you with some tools to help you better understand art's language.

## *The Calling of St. Matthew*

CARAVAGGIO, (1599-1600 CE)

---

Let's begin by focusing on *The Calling of St. Matthew* by Caravaggio (1599-1600). It is an oil painting from the Baroque period, which is classified by the use of:

- **tenebrism** (intense contrast of light and shadow)
- **realistic scenes and natural, earthbound figures** (less focused on the spiritual world, more focused on what is tangible; of this world)
- **geometry**, use of **diagonal lines**
- **movement**
- **foreshortening** (an illusion of **breaking the space** between the viewer and the painting, so one might feel as if they're in or a part of the art itself).

Pause here and examine the painting. Think about what the artist is trying to tell you through these baroque characteristics.

Made a guess? Great. Let's break it down.

---

## ART ANALYSIS

This scene depicts the moment before Matthew's conversion. Caravaggio paints from the Gospel passage, Matthew 9:9, *“As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. ‘Follow me,’ he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.”*

One of the first things to notice is that this painting is very dark. Caravaggio uses **light** to show us who's important and what to focus on. On the right, Jesus is slightly illuminated with a hint of the spiritual—a thin halo over His head. But, He gets a bit lost in the shadows and most of His body is covered by St. Peter, except for His head and right arm. This nods to the baroque element of being **realistic and grounding**. Caravaggio does not paint Jesus as



Jesus

St. Peter

a bright, idyllic being with a large, beaming halo; instead Jesus is depicted humbly and **bound to this earthly world**. Furthermore, Christ appears to be walking into a grungy tavern where the tax collectors are counting their change. It seems a very lowly thing for the Son of God to do.

This scene appears **very real and natural**. Nothing looks lavish or resembles the spiritual world. The figures are dressed in everyday clothing of the 1600's. It feels like you could **reach out and touch them**. There is even an

opening at the table in front of Matthew for us to sit. Caravaggio **breaks the space** between the viewer and the painting, allowing us to feel a part of it. However, on the other side of the scene, Peter stands between us and Jesus. This parallels how Peter is the Vicar of Christ for us.

Another thing to notice is the **geometry** in this painting. Light streams from the top right of





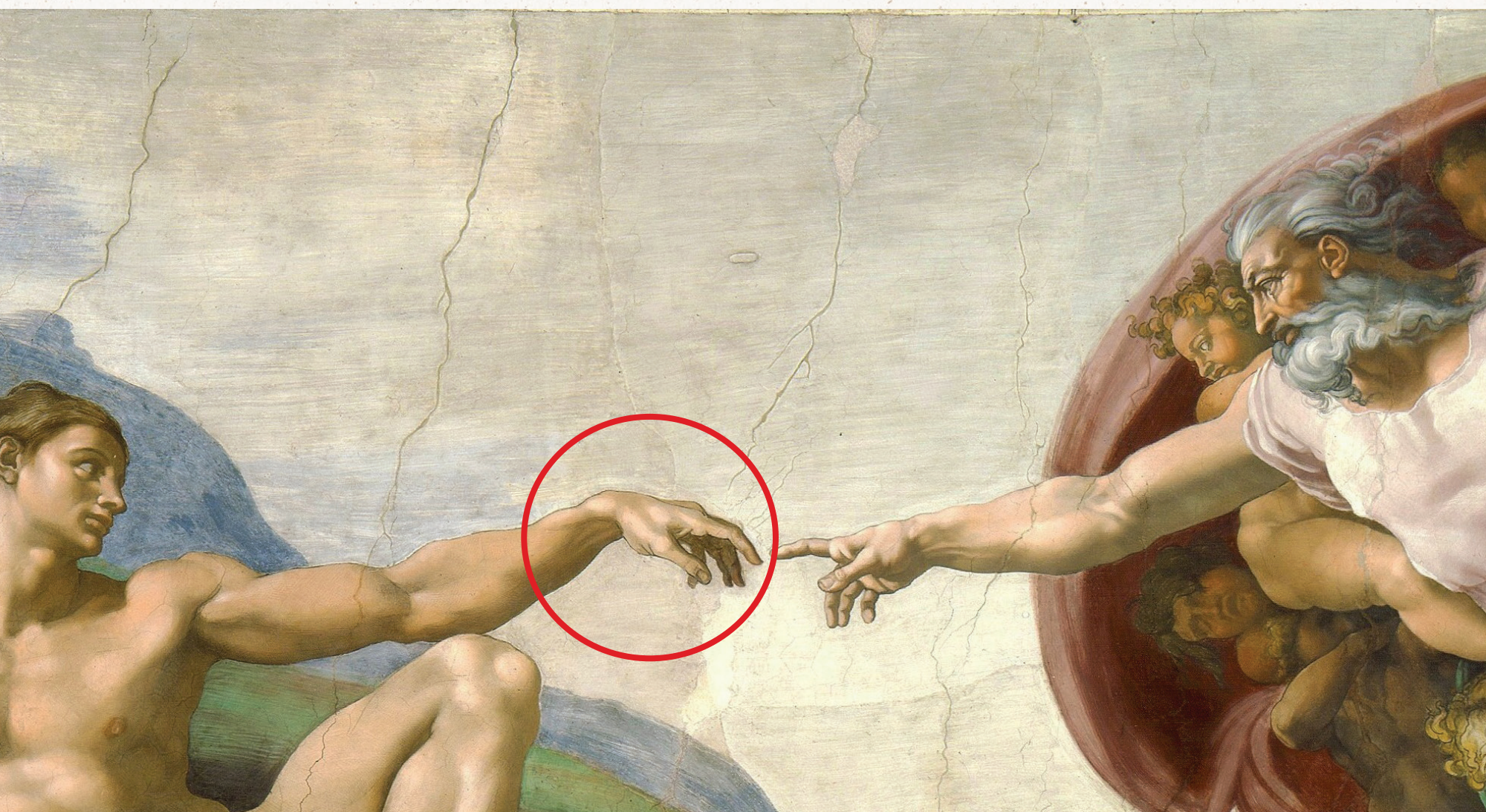
the canvas following Jesus' gaze and pointing hand down to Matthew. This creates a strong **diagonal**. This invisible diagonal line points to and reinforces who's important.

When the eye follows this invisible **diagonal**, we see Matthew. Like Jesus, he is also a little lost in the shadows. Matthew's body language is mostly open, but also conveys shock and disbelief. He is wide-eyed and his left hand points to himself in a questioning way, communicating, "Who me? Why do you want me, a tax collector, to follow you?" But, at the same time, Matthew's right hand is still on the coins, counting his profits. This not only creates a visual divide, but a spiritual divide. Matthew is conflicted; there is something worldly holding him back from following Christ.





There is something interesting about Jesus' hand gesture. He looks as if He is lazily pointing at Matthew. Does this gesture look familiar? Christ is imitating the same hand positioning from *The Creation of Adam* by Michaelangelo (1508-1512 CE). However, instead of Jesus copying God's hand, He mimics Adam's hand, communicating that He is the Second Adam.



---

## WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

1. This is the moment of Matthew's spiritual awakening and there is visually little that points to the spiritual. Instead, Carravgio paints what is tangible; as the spiritual is something that cannot be seen.
2. Jesus is willing to go to the dirty, lowly places for us. Jesus walked into a grimey tavern where the hated tax collectors were hanging out and counting their earnings. Jesus will meet you where you're at. There is no sin that is too terrible or messy for God.
3. We all have something we struggle with that harms our relationship with God. But, like Matthew, we have to remain open to God and allow Him to work through us.



## **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

- What is your initial feeling when viewing this piece?
- Is Jesus calling you to something specific?
- Have you experienced a conversion or spiritual awakening like St. Matthew? Or, are you in need of one?
- Are you attached to something worldly like St. Matthew? Does this create a division between you and God? Have you tried bringing that sin to God and asking for His help?
- Have you been to confession recently?

## **PRAYER**

Say a prayer in thanksgiving for the ability to connect with God through art and beauty. Bring your sins to Jesus and ask for help to let go and trust in Him this Lent.



## *Surprise & Delight Others*

{ secret service }

---

Lent is a season of almsgiving, and while we typically think of almsgiving in terms of financial gifts, it also includes acts of service.

Those who volunteer and serve in ministry often witness the amazing truth that what you give to others comes back to you greater than ever before. It's that warm feeling inside when you know you've done well. The greatest blessing is being a blessing to others.

We invite you to engage with this season by giving alms in a whole new way. Add some surprise and delight to the world around you with secret acts of service.

Each week we will give you a simple service challenge to fulfill some time during the week.

This week's secret act of service:

Pay for the person behind you in line.

This is best carried out at your go-to coffee shop, or maybe when you're picking up donuts on Saturday morning for the kids. For example, when you pull up to the drive-thru window while paying for your coffee, pay for the person behind you.

They will pull up and get the surprise and delight of having their order paid for, and you'll get the joy of knowing you've spread a little happiness into the world.

COMPLETED YOUR SECRET SERVICE?

---

Let us know how it went on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#): @thecatholictelegraph