

This second month is named for Febura, a Roman festival of purification once celebrated on February 15th. In Latin the name means "I purify by sacrifice." It is fitting that Lent begins in this second month, for this spiritual season provides an excellent opportunity to be purified by sacrifice and prayer. It was once said that if the weather is fine and frosty at the end of January and the beginning of February, it is wise not to put away one's warm winter clothes, for there is more winter ahead than behind. The Anglo-Saxons named this second month *Sprout-Kale*, for the time of the sprouting of kale or cabbage. They also called February *Fill-Dyke*, since it is the season when the snow melts and rains fall, causing the ditches to fill to overflowing. An old proverb says,

February fill dyke, be it black or be it white.
But if it be white, it's the better to like.



Feast of Holy and Humorous St. Brigid of Ireland, the Patroness of Nuns, Milkmaids and Fugitives.

Known as the "Mary of Ireland," this woman saint was a powerful force in Gaelic Christianity, known for her holiness and for performing miracles. Legend holds that a holy but slightly drunk Saint Mel consecrated her a bishop, and so she can be the patroness of women priests and bishops. Blessed Brigid, hasten the ordination of women in our day — for that will surely be a miracle.



Today, pray for bishops, or a new Church Council, drunk with the same wine as the apostles on the first Pentecost, the

wine of the Holy Spirit. So intoxicated by the divine, they might see clearly that nothing other than prejudice prevents women from being ordained priests and bishops. After all, early Christian home churches had leaders who were women, and it was the tradition for those community leaders to preside at the Eucharistic Meal. Even if no basis for such equality in all things could be found in Scripture or tradition, Jesus told his disciples, "I have much more to tell you, but you cannot bear to hear it now" (Jn. 16: 12), that the Spirit of God would continue to guide us. Surely the Spirit can lead us to this Godly reality of equality and the full use of all God's gifts. On this feast day of St. Brigid, regardless of your church or religious faith, pray that in the new millennium women may be given full, rightful and equal status.

St. Brigid was also known for her good humor. A touch of Irish wit is only proper on her feast. There's a story of a family from Kerry that was delighted when an Irish matchmaker found a wife for their handsome but poor eldest son. The matchmaker's choice was the daughter of a very rich Waterford farmer. But when the eldest son saw the bride-to-be, he turned her down. His father asked, "Lad, what's wrong with her? She's from a rich family!"

"Begob," said the son, "she's lame!"

"And what's that to it?" asked the father. "Surely you're not wanting her for racing?"



2 Groundhog Day and the Feast of the Purification, or Candlemas, the End of Traditional Christmas.

Forty days after Christmas, this feast celebrates Jesus being presented in the temple, where the rites of purification were performed for Mary, his mother. Since the liturgy for this feast of the Purification refers to Jesus as the Light of the world, it became the custom to bless candles on this day – thus the name Candle Mass or Candlemas. In former ages, this day marked the conclusion of the celebration of Christmas, and only then were home decorations removed. One tradition called for cutting

down the tree from which would come the yule log to be used the next Christmas. Such ancient customs seem quaint to us today – for our customs are dictated more by the business market and its power-gospel of advertising.



Today also marks the midpoint in the season of winter and is by tradition a day for forecasting weather and the arrival of spring. Yet this highly anticipated forecast is made not by computers or radar but by a groundhog. Coming out of his hole, if the groundhog sees his shadow, he returns for six more weeks of hibernation. If there is no shadow, he climbs out of bed to greet the early arrival of spring.

Hibernation is practiced by more than just groundhogs. In nature its purpose is for the survival of life in the midst of hostile winter. Humans, however, also hibernate to escape from the harsh realities of life. Many are those who retreat into their holes from hostile forces, real or imagined, only occasionally peeking out to test the emotional weather. On this second day of February, ask yourself if you are hibernating from some threat, problem or difficult issue instead of coming out of your hole. Like the groundhog, when we hibernate we become sluggish of spirit, our gifts remain dormant and our lives are lived only half-awake.



Spiritual Weather Forecast Day. The shadow of the clouds of doom and gloom have hung over humanity since time began. Armageddon, the day of doom, seems to be an elastic day. The battle of Armageddon was forecast in the book of the Apocalypse (Rev. 16: 16) as the great battle between good and evil, the Devil's "Last Stand." Many spiritual forecasters are predicting one or another year around the millennium crossing as the terrible time of Armageddon. They look for signs in society and in nature as the overture to this final day of destruction.

The signs used to forecast this approach of the End Times are many, ranging from the way the stars are constellated in

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the sky to the proposed common currencies in North America and Europe.



Noah is the patron saint of weather forecasters, and also the patron of those who ride out the storm. Today, when stormy weather predictions of destruction are common, let Noah and his wife be inspirations that you can ride out the storm if you are willing to build an ark.

No wood is needed for this ark, only the lumber of love soaked in hope. Fasten together the planks with prayerful devotion and secure them with an iron trust in God's abounding love. Bring aboard your ark not simply your family but all of creation as your companions. Then live in your ark; make it your home, rain or shine. I solemnly assure you that regardless of how terrible and long is the storm, you will see God's rainbow when the clouds clear.



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Birthday of Rosa Louise Parks, 1913. Today's festival honors the birth of the brave African-American woman who refused to give up her seat in the front of a bus to a white man on December 1, 1955. Her courage in refusing to acknowledge the validity of Montgomery, Alabama's segregated seating laws led to her arrest by the police. Her brave defiance of the injustice and ugly evils of racial segregation initiated the Montgomery bus boycott by African-Americans, beginning the Civil Rights Movement in the United States.



Rosa Parks broke a law so that laws could be made forbidding segregation. This day offers an opportunity to examine how each of us responds to injustice in words or by actions. Rejoice, today, in the birth of this heroine whose quiet determination to resist evil began a revolution for the civil rights of all Americans that continues to ripple throughout the world.



Feast of St. Agatha, Patroness of Buns and Bells.

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This Sicilian saint is invoked in the face of danger from breast diseases, fires and volcanic eruptions. In 251 she rejected the advances of a pagan Roman senator, who thereupon had her breasts cut off. In art she is typically shown holding them on a plate. People who didn't know her story easily mistook these artistic representations for bells or buns, and so she became the patroness of bell makers and bun bakers. On this day, round buns or breads were once blessed in churches and were called Agatha's buns. The rest of her patronage is explained by the fact that she was sentenced to be burned at the stake but her execution was interrupted by a Sicilian volcanic eruption. Eventually she was beheaded.



Consider calling on St. Agatha the next time you are caught in a sudden volcanic eruption — whether it happens at a mountain on the Pacific Rim or in your home, your office or on the street. As the pace of life grows ever more hectic, such volcanic explosions are becoming commonplace.

Contemporary advertising uses women's breasts to attract customers to products that range from spark plugs to spare parts. This feast that views Agatha's breasts as blessed offers an opportunity to restore women's breasts to their bodies rather than being perceived as objects for commercialization.

Perhaps instead of churches blessing buns as symbols of Agatha's breasts on this day, the coming years will see a new ritual of blessing breasts on her feast. Such a blessing might assist the respectful viewing of a woman's entire body as good and beautiful. And the present threat of breast cancer makes Agatha's feast a powerful holy day for women.



The Birthday of Babe Ruth, 1895.

George Herman, the Babe, was born on this day in 1895 in Baltimore, Maryland. His baseball career began in 1914; after pitching for the Boston Red Sox, he was sold in 1920 to the New York Yankees where he

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played in the outfield. He set many records, and was called the greatest slugger in baseball because of the 714 home runs he hit in regular season games. Yet what is often overlooked is that the great Babe Ruth struck out over 1,000 times!



This February day provides a tonic for you if it seems that you are constantly “striking out,” missing the mark and making mistakes. Do not feel dejected by your string of errors; rather, find encouragement in Babe Ruth who was remembered not for his records in striking out but for his home runs.

Fear of striking out, whether in business or romance, in prayer or politics, should never prevent you from stepping up to the plate and taking a swing at whatever life next pitches at you. Don't hide in the dugout of life, protesting that you only make errors, but with the swagger of the Babe walk up to bat with confidence.

God loves losers, as was clearly shown by Jesus of Nazareth, whose death on the cross was the ultimate strikeout — for it appeared that the devil and evil had won the game and defeated not only all that is good and right but even God. God does more with strikeouts than with home runs, or so it seems in the message of the Gospels. The Good News lived out by Jesus was that everything is upside down, the reversal of society's status structure, the world's way of winning. By his parables and by his life, Jesus taught God's lesson that often what is out is in, defeat is victory and those who are up are really down.



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Pedestrian Prophecy Day, 1899. “Everything that can be invented has been invented” — Charles H. Duell, Commissioner of the U.S. Office of Patents, speaking in 1899. Reflect, today, on all that has awed the world since 1899 and you will have a snapshot of what awaits us in the twenty-first century. As someone once said, “The future ain't what it use to be.”



This Almanac acts as a bridge between millenniums. The

supersonic speed at which new discoveries and inventions will appear in this new millennium will be awesome. Each new advance in technology and science, however, requires a corresponding advance in our thinking. Albert Einstein once said, "Since the breaking of the atom, everything in the world has changed but our thinking."

Look about your life and reflect on how some commonplace twentieth century invention has changed the way you think, the way you see the world and yourself. See if it has expanded your vision and your heart. A test case for this reflection could be to ask yourself whether television, as a window on the world, has made you more compassionate toward the sufferings of the peoples of other nations? Has television been an instrument of entertainment or of expanding your heart to include your neighbors in need on the other side of the globe?

Consider applying this experiment to other twentieth century inventions.



February Pentecost Vigil. The annual celebration of the Holy Spirit, the feast of Pentecost, comes fifty days after Easter. In the prayer and worship year, today celebrates the second feast of the Spirit. This February feast of God's Holy Wind initiates the coming Lenten Season, forty windblown days on the way to Easter.



The Gospels tell us that it was the Spirit of God that drove Jesus into the desert for his forty days of prayer and fasting. We, likewise, need to have God's Holy Wind at our backs if we wish to celebrate a productive and prayerful Lenten season.



Today is a good day to begin to prepare for Lent by praying for the gift of God's Wind to fill your sails. Woe to those who leave port on Ash Wednesday with no wind behind them, for they face the curse of being stalled, as if they had never raised anchor. Don't be caught off guard by the sudden appearance of Ash Wednesday; begin today to pray for God's Wind. This prayer could be part of your daily pre-Lenten devotions:

Come, Holy Spirit, and inspire me to renewal and reform,
challenge me to prepare for days
of reinvention and recreation.



9 **Feast of St. Apollonia, Martyr and Patroness of Dentists and Those Afflicted with Toothaches.**

Apollonia was an unmarried woman of Alexandria in Egypt in the third century. For providing a safe house for Christians, a mob of pagans tortured her, breaking and removing her teeth in the process of trying to kill her. Fearing that she would deny her faith as a result of her great pain, Apollonia leapt into a fire and died.

Apollonia's martyrdom made her the patroness of those who suffer from toothaches as well as the patroness of professionals who attempt to remove the pain. Be grateful today if your religion does not forbid your seeking relief from painful tooth problems.



The feast of Apollonia provides an occasion to reflect on the pain experienced at the termination of life. Like a root canal or the removal of a wisdom tooth, dying can hardly be painless. This feast also raises the question of the right to anticipate your death, since saintly Apollonia apparently thought she had this right. Anticipation is a legal and musical term with spiritual implications. In law, *anticipation* refers to the use of an inheritance before it is available for use. In music it means introducing a note of a new chord before the previous chord is resolved.

On this feast of Apollonia, consider discussing anticipated death with friends or family. Death is the doorway to a new song of life and the reward of our inheritance Jesus promised to those who believe in him. If you can legally and musically anticipate, can you not also morally anticipate your death — and your promised inheritance? Before making a quick judgement on this moral problem, consider today's lack of universal medical care, especially for the poor and certain terminally ill persons,

and the scarcity of hospice care. These issues, along with making medicines for controlling and removing pain easily available to all who are in need of them, are all significant aspects of this moral question. Pray, today, to Apollonia, as the patroness of those who contemplate anticipating their deaths, for guidance and faith.



Today in 1870 also marked the **Establishment of the U.S. Weather Bureau**. If you are brave enough to have an open, free discussion of the issue of anticipated death, I can predict without much risk of error that you will experience stormy weather today.



The Second Coming of the Groundhog. On this day, according to some old legends, the groundhog again comes out of his hole to check on whether winter is about over. Regardless of his previous prediction on February 2, today he makes a new prediction based on the facts and events of the past eight days. Learn a lesson from the groundhog, especially about those things that may have frightened you earlier in life.

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Whenever you have had a few days to ponder – have gained new insights or advice – consider acting like the groundhog and do not hesitate to make a new judgment. Blessed are those who, when they recognize a deeper truth, frequently change their minds – and by doing so, change their lives.



Nelson Mandela Released from Prison Day, 1990. This South African president was an ex-con. Use this day to examine your prejudices and fears about those who have been imprisoned and released. Nelson Mandela is not unique in being an innocent man who's been imprisoned unjustly for years. What

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are your feelings regarding those who have served their sentence in prison and are now released into society? Without God's vision as to their innocence or guilt, how should you treat them now that they are released from prison?

As a second reflection for this day of Mandela's release from prison, ponder his friendly, generous and non-vengeful attitude toward those who imprisoned him. By his humane treatment of those who "stole" a good part of his life, he has provided a powerful model for how to respond to mistreatment and pain. Mandela did not require "justice" for those who had taken away precious freedom and the prime years of his life. Instead, he practiced heroic forgiveness and love for the common good.



This is a day to reflect on how we should respond to those who are responsible for offenses against us and our families. The common good of the world and everyone in it requires that we become heroic in the style of Nelson Mandela.



12 **Birthday of President Abraham Lincoln, 1809.**

Lincoln was the last president to be elected who did not belong to a particular Christian denomination. He was, however, deeply religious; he kept a Bible on his desk and would read it often for comfort and guidance. We might wonder if Lincoln could be elected today; not only was he not a member of any church, Lincoln was also convinced that he was illegitimate, like his mother. He once observed, however, that "bastards are generally smarter, shrewder, and more intelligent than others." Only after his assassination on April 14, 1865, and his death on April 15, was it proven that Abraham Lincoln was not illegitimate.



When young Lincoln was fourteen, his parents joined the Pigeon Creek Baptist Church. At that time there were bitter feelings and fierce competition among Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians and members of other Christian denominations.

Lincoln disliked the animosity he saw in churches, and this fact is proposed as the reason why he never joined a church as an adult.

This would be a good day to reflect on what makes any church or religion legitimate. Does not being a true child of God imply having a real respect for all God's children? Perhaps, then, illegitimate religions and "bastard" churches can be recognized when their members do not love and respect those of other faiths. Instead of seeing other religious people as sons and daughters of God, illegitimate believers attack others and their beliefs. As this day honors one of the greatest American presidents, look with new eyes upon any friends or family who, like Lincoln, live compassionate lives and are concerned about justice for all but do not go to church.



Birthday of the Million, 1300. Cathedral church bells must have rung out loudly and canons boomed their salutes to accompany the joyful shouts of clergy, nobles and peasants at the birth of the *Million*. With the narrow medieval streets filled with drunken celebrators, university scholars must have pondered the rapidly expanding world that now required the ability to count things to the staggering sum of one million. Prior to this awesome event, the largest number used was the Greek *myriad*, which meant 10,000. When asked how many poppy seeds existed in the entire universe, the mathematician Archimedes (200 B.C.) is reported to have said, "myriads of myriads of myriads."

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In only seven hundred years we have come to counting in not only hundreds of millions, but billions and trillions, if not zillions of trillions. Numbers beyond those we can count on our fingers are easily lost in the whirl of such staggering figures. As you prepare for tomorrow's feast of lovers and friends, recall the line of an old hit song: "I found my million dollar baby in a five and ten cent store." While your beloved may be worth a million dollars, love can only embrace numbers like one or two, or for those with extra-large hearts perhaps as many as five to

ten. Reflect, today, on the fact that God does not love a million people, God loves one at a time. Rejoice on this eve of Valentine's Day that to God you are Number One. On this birthday of the Million, rejoice if you are loved by someone, because to that person you are also Number One.



14 St. Valentine's Day, Feast of Friendship and Love.

This is the second largest feast for sending greeting cards, with over one million sold annually, about half that of Christmas cards. In fact, this is the birthday of the greeting card. On this day in 1445 the first known card, a love note, was smuggled out of the Tower of London. For centuries, men have proposed marriage in handwritten, decorated Valentine's Day messages. In the 1840s Esther Howland became the first commercial publisher of valentines. Until that time all cards were hand colored – and even thereafter many cards were created by hand and heart. This artistic love affair with greeting cards, along with Esther Howland's initiative, led to the pre-Civil War days of 1840-1860 becoming the grand age of valentines.

While this is a festival for friends and lovers, it is interesting to note that three out of four valentines are sent to relatives. Men continue to purchase valentines more than any other kind of card.

Today honors Saint Valentio, who died in prison on this day in 269. Legend has it that this saintly man enjoyed playing Cupid, that before he was imprisoned he secretly married couples who had been banned from marriage by the Roman emperor Claudius II. February 14 is also an example of a baptized pagan feast; it incorporated Lupercalia, which was celebrated at the same time of year. On this Roman festival young men drew the names of women they would court that year.



While greeting card companies produce beautiful full-color cards, why not consider making an "old-fashioned 1445-1840" valentine for that special person in your life. First, become hearing-impaired to the voice of your inner-critic who harps

that you can't even draw a straight line. As you create your own original, one-of-a-kind work of art, remind yourself that it's the passion and love with which you create your love card, and not the artistic execution or design, that will make it a masterpiece. Not only will it be the work of a master lover, but a treasure to keep.



Non-Spectator Day. A principle of Zen states, "Being a spectator while one is also a participant spoils one's performance." Today, beware of *watching* yourself instead of *being* yourself. Early in life we take on the habit of self-observation to monitor our behavior. Yet trying to be both the audience and the performer at the same time leads to being stilted and unnatural. While frequent self-supervision is helpful to remove habits and behavior that are unloving or irritating to others, like all good things self-monitoring should be done in moderation.

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As the Zen masters say, "When you eat, eat; when you walk, walk." Living in the present moment as fully as possible helps satisfy the itch to monitor yourself and still be yourself. As in theater, so in life – the true artists are those who are so fully possessed by what they are doing that they have no time to watch themselves. When they forget to be possessed in this way and give into the temptation to observe their wonderful performance, then they usually stumble.

Practice today the virtue of self-forgetfulness, which is at the heart of making love – being totally engaged in what you are doing or in another person. Those who make love daily by self-forgetfulness find ecstasy in celebrating the love they have been making day by day.



The Invention of Monkey Business, 5,000,000 B.C. Today celebrates the primate's "best kept secret." Usually

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inventions and discoveries are front-page news, but not so with Monkey Business. The French philosopher, Rene Descartes, is said to have speculated that monkeys and apes have the ability to speak but that they keep it a secret. Descartes said they keep silent to avoid being put to work. While the name of their craft, Monkey Business, did not appear until 1828, monkeys have made having a good time their business for over five million years. Learn a lesson from your ancestors high in the branches of your family tree and learn to keep quiet.



The next time you feel like criticizing someone or “telling it the way it is,” think twice. You may have to spend four times the time and work repairing the damage done by your quick temper. As with monkeys, not speaking will help you to avoid unnecessary work.

Also, if you have to attend a meeting or are selected to be on some committee, consider practicing a little Monkey Business. Those who freely speak out are often the first to be placed on committees or given assignments to perform. If you want more playtime in your life, practice this brief Monkey Business ritual as you enter a meeting: Moving your hands to match your words, say to yourself, “See nothing, hear nothing and *speak nothing*.” Protect your playtime; it is essential for creativity and for making love. Friendship and love without play quickly evolve into dull duties, into simply obligations to be kept.



17 The Discovery of the Planet Pluto, 1930. On this day in 1930, Clyde Tombaugh discovered the planet Pluto at 3,690 million miles from the sun. Percival Lowell had begun the search in the first decade of the twentieth century. He was seeking a planet named “X,” whose existence was based on the irregular motions in the orbits of Uranus and Neptune.

The smallest of our sun-star planets, Pluto is not like its sister planets but is more a methane snowball. Some astronomers think Pluto should be called a distant asteroid rather than a real planet. From Pluto, our blinding sun would seem no larger

than Jupiter appears from Earth!



Spend a few seconds today to reflect on the fact that this planet, which existed from the birth of our solar family, was not discovered by earthlings until 1930. This discovery is within the lifetime of some of you reading this Almanac. In the coming fifty years of the new century, also within the lifetime of some who are reading this Almanac, will come a fantastic parade of such discoveries. Blessed are those with elastic minds and hearts which can easily expand with wonder. Woe to those who are inflexible in heart and mind, for they shall snap under the strain of the twenty-first century.



Be Salt Day. Jesus told his followers, “You are the salt of the earth.” That image is as rich in opportunities for holiness as there are varieties of uses for salt. It has been estimated that salt has over 14,000 specific industrial applications: food seasoning, curing of animal hides, use in the manufacture of plastics, dyes, insecticides, explosives, rayon, chlorine gas and cosmetics, to list just a few. Salt is a natural preservative for foods, as in the curing of meats. It is also necessary in making bread, cheese and other foods. Furthermore, salt hinders the growth of bacteria and yeast.

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If you're a follower of Jesus, today's a good day to experiment with new and different ways to be salt to your world. You can, in fact, try as many ways as the number of uses for salt. Consider, today, being “salt” by preserving tradition or by hindering the growth of the bacteria of prejudice and revenge. Embody the salt necessary to make insecticides for those things that “bug” you, or to develop explosives to awaken the living dead, or to whip up some cosmetics to put a happy face on a sad experience.



19 Clean Your Coffee and Tea Cup Day. The practical life and the spiritual life are one, and the wise remove any seeming lines between them. So, today, mix equal amounts of table salt and white vinegar and use the mixture to clean your stained china.

In 1914, Sterling Morton II, son of the “Old Salt” himself, the founder of the Morton Salt Company, suggested the slogan, “When it rains, it pours.” This was not meant to be a glib commentary about the negative side of life but to convey that Morton Salt would pour easily even in the negative weather of life.



Yes, the spiritual life and the practical life are one. Take a little time today to reflect on whether, like the salt of the earth, you pour out good humor, kindness and love as easily on your “rainy” days as you do on your sunny days. If not, examine yourself for the reasons why you are only sunny-day salt. It’s on stormy days, when computers break down, marriages break up, business deals break apart and depression breaks out, that the good old salt of humor and compassion most need to flow – just like Morton salt.



20 The February Blahs Day. *Blah* is American slang for bland or unexciting. These gray February days are the Blah Days, difficult days to get up in the morning, difficult to maintain focussed attention, difficult for teachers trying to inspire their students. Teaching, like parenting, requires great faith in the future and great patience with the present. It is said that all truly good education is the construction of a *time-delayed-action-bomb*; it is assembled carefully in the classroom for explosion at a later date.



If you find yourself impatient today with any work whose harvest is in the far distant future, take heart. Take care as you

daily fill the bombs of your projects or relationships with beauty and truth, creativity and confidence, joy and excitement, hope and freedom. Then set the timer for...later. It is also said, "A school is a building that has four walls with tomorrow inside." The same is true of a home with small children, or of any good church!



Death Day of Malcolm X, 1965. Born in Omaha, Nebraska, in 1925 with the name Malcolm Little, he was sent to prison for burglary in 1946. There he embraced the Black Muslim faith and upon his release from prison in 1952 became a Muslim minister and a charismatic advocate of African-American separatism. He split with Elijah Muhammad of the Black Muslim religion and while on a pilgrimage to Mecca was converted to Orthodox Islam. In 1964 he founded the Organization of Afro-American Unity, which while promoting Black Nationalism also was open to interracial unity. He was assassinated in Harlem on this day in 1965 by gunmen who were purported to be Black Muslims.

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Malcolm X's death day is an occasion to remember the ugly racial segregation that existed at the time of his death and that still persists. Black Americans were not allowed to attend schools with white Americans, to swim in the same pools, eat in the same restaurants, ride together on public transportation or even to vote, to mention but a few of the shameful segregation laws that existed in America. As citizens of this land which boasts of equal rights, we should never forget, never let eclipse from our memory, this time of shameful, hate-filled segregation of other citizens. Perhaps someday, one of our presidents will make a public confession for the long years of the national sin of segregation, asking forgiveness of those who because of their race had this social sin inflicted upon them by individuals, society and their government.

Today, take a good look at your life and consider if there are any present sins of segregation of which you, our society or

our government are guilty.



22 **Birthday of President George Washington, 1732.**

Our first president proposed that he receive no salary, but only be reimbursed for his expenses. This had been his practice while a general in the revolutionary army, and he wished to continue it. So, although Congress had fixed the salary for the president at \$25,000 a year, Washington refused to take it. However, his expenses amounted to almost exactly what his salary would have been. His detailed expense account recorded even the most insignificant of needs, including a ball of string!

Washington was a Virginia planter who owned slaves. Yet, unlike Patrick Henry and Thomas Jefferson, Washington's will granted his slaves freedom at his death. Especially since he was frequently in debt and could have used the money, Washington's generous parting deed is far more significant than his having served as President of the United States for only room and board.



Heroic acts are often overshadowed both in history and private life by lesser ones. Living by the words you profess, whether words of the Declaration of Independence or your religious creed, require greater heroic conviction than the seemingly bold deeds applauded by crowds. Examine your life on this day of George Washington's birth and consider how authentic you are to your beliefs.



23 **Lenten Satellite Day.** This is a Lenten celebration not to see if you are like a moon orbiting around a planet or some NASA object orbiting the earth, but to see if you are an original satellite. The word *satellite* was first used for a person who attended, or was a follower of, some prince or person of great importance. The satellite was a parasite, who praised the prince

and curried favor for personal gain.



Today, pause and ponder whether you are a disciple-follower of Jesus or only a satellite. A true disciple is called not to flatter or fawn over the master with pious songs and prayers, but to follow the master. As Jesus himself said, "It is not those who say, 'Lord, Lord,' who shall enter God's domain but those who daily do the will of God" (Mt. 7: 21).

In the prayer of Jesus, we say with one breath, "your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven." To follow Jesus is to strive constantly to make God's time-reign-kingdom come wherever you work, live or even visit. No better definition for a disciple of Jesus could be found than one who makes God's time his or her time. The prophets spoke of God's reign as coming at some distant time, and Jesus announced that this long-awaited time had come with him. So it must be for all who dare call themselves his followers. If our lives announce only the old time of injustice, inequality and religious, racial and sexual division, regardless of how many times we have been *baptized*, we should find another name for ourselves besides Christian.



Walpurgisnacht, Night of the Witches. If you go out after dark tonight, keep an eye in the sky not for shooting stars but for flying witches. On the eve of the feast of Saint Walpurgis, who later became known as Saint Walburga, it was the legend in Northern Germany that witches gathered to hold their secret rituals in the Hartz Mountains. While Saint Walburga was a holy nun, her name was perhaps confused with that of the Teutonic goddess Walburg, accounting for the odd connection of a holy woman with witches.

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This Walpurgisnacht, consider how easily old pagan or pre-Christian symbols are married to Christian ones, and rejoice.

The principles of Celtic evangelization, or conversion a la Saint Patrick, were: Take people as you find them, build on what you find already present, change only what is absolutely necessary and graft the message of Jesus onto the sturdy stock of whatever people you encounter. Do not be scandalized if you scratch the skin of any Christian practice, holiday or ritual and find a pagan skeleton. Rather, reverence this relic of religious childhood with the conviction that its seeds were God-planted.

Add some frosting to this reflection by asking yourself these questions: What present secular celebrations should be made into religious holy days? And what songs, rituals and sacred signs would be appropriate to them?



25 **Feast of St. Walburga of Germany, Healer and Abbess, and the Birthday of Showman Buffalo Bill Cody, 1846.**

This English nun was a forerunner of woman's equality. In 761 she broke with church policy and became both the abbess and abbot of an order of nuns and monks. As an herbalist, she is a patron of crops. Since she was skilled in medicine, she is a protector against frenzy and coughs. In this season of colds and coughs, consider praying this blessing for those afflicted with colds: May St. Walburga, woman of power, cure your cough.



Today, don't forget Buffalo Bill, who is more famous for his showmanship than for the number of buffaloes he killed. When we have to attend to a duty we prefer not doing, we often are tempted to revert to childhood patterns and use a minor illness to stay home from "school." If you're tempted to stay home from work, to miss some boring meeting or other obligation, using the excuse that you've got a cold, consider praying this blessing: "Old Buffalo Bill, great showman, remind me that 'the show must go on!'"



Lenten Fast Day. Moslems, Jews and Christians all have religious days of ritual fasting. Abstaining from food has an ancient history as an act of purification, a sign of mourning for both personal and national afflictions. At one time for Catholics, Lent was a fast of forty days and is still an encouraged religious action today for this season of renewal.

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We could use more fasting in our country if Harper's Index is correct. It states that, at the current rate of increase, by the year 2059 *all* Americans will be overweight!

While religious fasting from food has significant value as an act of discipline – and nothing of value can be achieved without discipline – the question is: fasting from what? On this Lenten day, regardless of your religious denomination, instead of controlling what goes into your mouth, consider fasting from what comes out! Practice the discipline of not allowing any negative words, harsh judgments or opinions of others to leave your mouth.



Given a choice, we should always seek the greater good. Far greater good would come to the world by abstaining from what exits your mouth than reducing the food or drink that goes into your mouth. As a penance, such fasting from foul talk is much more difficult than fasting from food. As today's food for thought, reflect on these words of Jesus, "What comes out of the mouth has its source in the heart; and that is what defiles a person" (Mt. 15: 18). "For the words that the mouth speaks come from the overflowing of the heart" (Lk. 6: 45).



Heart Home X-Ray Day. A healthy heart requires a good diet, proper exercise and frequent medical examinations. Now a new home examination makes it possible for you to see clearly into your heart and to know precisely the condition of its health.

27



This day's reflection is a home health care examination. To

take the examination, sit still for a few minutes and reflect on your conversations in the past few days. The basis of this test is found in yesterday's words of Jesus that what we say is from the overflowing of our hearts. If your speech is full of negative comments about others, then your heart is overflowing with toxic acid. If your speech is tainted with the venom of cynicism and criticism, then your heart is full of poison. If you find your words green with envy and jealousy, even if they are disguised as humor, then you have a crystal clear x-ray of your heart filled with puss. Throughout this day, take frequent mini heart tests, even in the midst of a conversation, as you monitor your speech.



28 International Day of Reinvention. Consider, today, how to reinvent yourself as part of being a follower of Jesus. His primal call was for us to reform, or reinvent, ourselves in order to live in God's kingdom. Reinvention is essential – since each of us enters life as an original, why should we leave it as a copy? Most of us have been invented by family, friends, obligations, social expectations and customs.



If you have a few minutes today, draw a blueprint or outline for how you might like to redesign yourself. You can also list those overused parts of yourself that could stand to be removed, or draw up a list of your undeveloped talents and the parts of yourself that to date have been neglected.



Leap Year

29 Feast of the Leaping St. Oswald of Worcester. From his death in 992 until the early twentieth century the feast of this English monk of Danish descent was celebrated only in leap years. Then in the 1930s Oswald's feast was moved to February 28. (In case you're asked, a leap year is every year

whose number is divisible by four. However, centennial years become leap years only when they can be divided by 400.)

Today's saint could be called St. Oswald the Unemployed since he seems to have been forgotten when patron assignments were given out. While a holy monk-bishop, he wasn't surrounded by any of the grand legends of wondrous exploits necessary to become a patron saint. Perhaps it is time as we cross over into a new millennium to correct this omission and make him the patron of those who leapfrog their holy days and holy duties.

Blessed St. Oswald,
patron of those who only attend church
once every four, or fourteen, years
and whose spiritual life is frequently abandoned
as they leap from week to week
without praying on bended knee,
pray for us.



On the other hand, leapfrogging over certain obligations can have a recreative effect, serving to renew and refresh our spirits. Furthermore, if you have a moment to spare, consider what life might be like if Oswald's old feast day wasn't the only one celebrated just in leap years. What if Christmas, Easter, Valentine's Day, the World Series, the Super Bowl or the Academy Awards were celebrated only every four years? If this Old Oswald factor were introduced, perhaps these religious and secular holy days might be entered into with greater zest and joy and we would begin to truly appreciate them for what they are.

