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Fr. Tom Reese with his Amazon Echo. (RNS/Tom Reese)



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We have become addicted to our electronic gadgets, and if we are honest, we will acknowledge that it would be a huge penance to give up Alexa and our smartphones for Lent.

But that is not my recommendation. Rather, I suggest we should use our digital gadgets to celebrate Lent better, especially during the pandemic that has made it so difficult to go to church.

Doing penance is one of the ancient traditions of Lent. It reflects the Christian's desire to spend 40 days fasting in imitation of Jesus, who fasted in the desert. It also has historical roots in the time when public sinners were required to do public penance during Lent, only to be readmitted to church at the Easter Vigil.

Penance was not always the central focus of Lent. In ancient times, Lent was also a time to prepare catechumens for baptism at the Easter Vigil. The catechumens, most of them illiterate, would gather in the cathedral every day during Lent, and the bishop would teach them about Christianity. This was before the printing press, so there were no readymade catechisms. Instead, he used the Scripture readings of the day.

As a result, the daily Scripture readings during Lent are a wonderful summary of the Christian message. They include the most famous and most important readings of the Scriptures: on fasting and prayer, on forgiveness and reconciliation, on commitment and charity, on justice and love, etc. Our favorite parables are also read during this season.

They are the original catechism of the Catholic Church. Reading or listening to these Scripture readings is a perfect way to spend Lent, even if you cannot go to church. This is where our new gadgets can help us during a COVID Lent when it is often impossible to go to church.

Every morning when I am trying to get out of bed, I say, "Alexa, get Catholic Daily for today's readings." She then reads me the Scripture readings of the day. I have been doing this since I first [reported it](#) more than two years ago when my brother gave me an Amazon Echo Dot.

"Catholic Daily" is what Amazon calls a "skill" that can be downloaded into the Amazon Alexa app on a smartphone.

Alexa does not mind repeating the readings throughout the day, which is great since I need reminding. In the evening, I tell her, "Alexa, get Catholic Daily for tomorrow's readings." Then I sleep on the readings. She is even smart enough to skip a few days ahead, if, for example, I ask her, "Alexa, get Catholic Daily for Sunday's readings."

If you would prefer human voices, download the Alexa skill "Catholic Daily Mass Readings." This skill should be connected to Alexa's "Flash Briefing," which can be found under "News" in "Settings." Tell her "Flash Briefing," and she will then play the audio version of the "Daily Readings from the New American Bible," which is available at Bible.USCCB.org.

If you do not have Alexa, you can listen to these same readings as a podcast. In your podcast library, search for "USCCB Daily Readings Podcast." Or they can be accessed directly at Bible.USCCB.org.

For those who prefer to read the text, the daily Scripture readings are available at Bible.USCCB.org or through apps like iBreviary, which is available for smartphones or iPads.

Listening to, reading and praying over the Lenten Scripture selections is a great way to celebrate Lent, and modern technology can help us do it. Hopefully, you will find one of these digital practices addictive so that you continue using it after Lent.

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