

Lent 2025      Day One

***“If you send out goodness from yourself, or if you share that which is happy or good within you, it will all come back to you multiplied ten thousand times. In the kingdom of love there is no competition; there is no possessiveness or control. The more love you give away, the more love you will have.”***

**John O'Donohue**

To say that you reap what you sow can sound rather negative – almost like a threat. If you do harm to other people they are likely to do harm to you, those who live by the sword die by the sword and all that. However the opposite side of that coin is at least equally true. Being able to spread goodness, kindness, happiness can only increase the amount of these things which are going around, and that can only be good for everyone.

In these times when we are all aware of the danger of infection, it is good to remember that there is nothing as infectious as a smile – even if it is hidden under a mask! The more you give away the more you are likely to have.

**How can you send out goodness from yourself?**

Ian Manson

Lent 2025

Day Two

***“No one else has access to the world you carry around within yourself; you are its custodian and entrance. No one else can see the world the way you see it. No one else can feel your life the way you feel it. Thus it is impossible to ever compare two people because each stands on such different ground. When you compare yourself to others, you are inviting envy into your consciousness; it can be a dangerous and destructive guest.”***

John O'Donohue

Comparing ourselves with others feels so natural that it can be hard to imagine living any other way, hard to imagine escaping it. Those who do achieve such freedom often come across as eccentric, or at best a little unusual. There seems to be some strong instinct in us to want to be 'normal', to want to fit in.

There is nothing wrong with that. Perhaps we need it in order to be able to live together in community. Yet this concern about how we look in comparison with others can also crush what is unique about us, stifle the special combination of qualities and insights and experiences which no one else in the world is able to offer to the world.

**What would it take for you to value yourself more?**

Ian Manson

Lent 2025

Day Three

***“It could be a meeting on the street, or a party or a lecture, or just a simple, banal introduction, then suddenly there is a flash of recognition and the embers of kinship glow. There is an awakening between you, a sense of ancient knowing.”***

John O'Donohue

Parties and lectures may not seem a like a big part of our lives, and even banal introductions might not be as common as they once were. Life may have recovered in many ways since the lockdown years, yet our communities can still feel quieter than they once were.

However it remains true that it is often when we are in the company of others, in conversation with others, that we come to understand something about ourselves. They may not be big revelations, but the steady stream of small recognitions help to build our confidence and our sense of who we are. Those who help us to know ourselves most are those we call friends, and we should not underestimate the contribution they make to our lives.

Who has been a good friend to you?

Ian Manson

Lent 2025

Day Four

***“Your noble friend will not accept pretension but will gently and very firmly confront you with your own blindness. Such friendship is creative and critical; it is willing to negotiate awkward and uneven territories of contradiction and woundedness.”***

John O'Donohue

The real value of a friend is not always what we might think. We tend to appreciate shared interests, good company, the way a friend can make us smile and feel good about ourselves. All of that is valuable of course and much to be appreciated, yet there is also a deeper kind of friendship which can go beyond these things.

The deeper friendship not only accepts us, but is able to challenge. It is strong enough to cope with the periods of awkwardness which can follow a disagreement, strong enough to cope with the tensions which can arise when uncomfortable questions are raised or attitudes are challenged. It is in these deeper kinds of friendships that we can learn the most about ourselves, and grow the most effectively into who we want to become.

What have you learned about yourself from friends?

Ian Manson

Lent 2025

Day Five

***“One of the most beautiful gifts in the world is the gift of encouragement. When someone encourages you, that person helps you over a threshold you might otherwise never have crossed on your own.”***

**John O'Donohue**

We know how powerful a wound criticism can create. Even when we disagree and argue our case, the hurt and the self-doubt which it leaves behind can have a corrosive effect on the soul. Encouragement has an equal and opposite effect. Even if we appear to allow the words to pass us by casually, they can have a lingering effect of allowing gifts and talents to blossom within.

If we recognise that as true for ourselves, we can be sure that it is equally true of others. This means that, without ever doing anything which looks significant, we can each have a powerful impact on the world. Encouragement is a gift which we are all able to offer, and we should never underestimate its value.

**When have you felt encouraged?**

Ian Manson

Lent 2025

Day Six

***“Behind your image, below your words, above your thoughts, the silence of another world waits.”***

**John O'Donohue**

Our image – that which we present to the outside world; our words – the way we express ourselves to the outside world; our thoughts – the way we process and form opinions in the silence of our minds; these things might seem like the sum total of who we are and what it means for us to have life. Yet somewhere in all of that, we have the sense that there is something more going on.

The ‘other world’ spoken of here is described as waiting in silence. We might think of it as a heavenly realm, or a divine presence, or the experience of love, or simply the unknown future which lies ahead of us. In any case it is clear that this aspect of reality is silent, and that it always waits for us to be ready to discover it. The fulness of life is so much bigger than what we have yet managed to understand or express.

**What has become part of your reality that you once did not know?**

Ian Manson

Lent 2025

Day Seven

***“It is a strange and wonderful fact to be here, walking around in a body, to have a whole world within you and a world at your fingertips outside you. It is an immense privilege, and it is incredible that humans manage to forget the miracle of being here. Rilke said, ‘Being here is so much,’ and it is uncanny how social reality can deaden and numb us so that the mystical wonder of our lives goes totally unnoticed. We are here. We are wildly and dangerously free.”***

**John O'Donohue**

We are here, we exist. That is the most basic and undeniable fact we have access to, yet one which is strangely hard to see. Or at least it seems incredibly hard for us to take in that this fact is not inevitable, that there is no reason other sheer giftedness for it to be true. This can so easily mask the sheer amazement which the truth of it deserves.

There may be many things which we would love to happen, whether that is in the field of our relationships, our career, or even just winning the lottery. Desiring things we might not get can lead to envy or disappointment, all keeping us blind to the simple truth that by being born we gained so much more than any little trinkets we might look to add to our existence.

**What might you do to be more thankful for the gift of life?**

Ian Manson

Lent 2025

Day Eight

***“Many of us have made our world so familiar that we do not see it anymore. An interesting question to ask yourself at night is, what did I really see this day?”***

**John O'Donohue**

In simpler days, when people lived more calmly, it may be that they saw much more of the world than we do. While we have access to so much more travel and communication, the sheer volume of the input which bombards our senses can make it difficult for us to notice any detail. If the world flashes past us at great speed, we may not be able to see much of it at all. If we can never shut off the constant input we will never be able to process what our eyes have been looking at. We can see everything and take in nothing.

So here is an invitation to slow down and pay attention. At least by asking the question each evening, we might become more aware of how little we see, how much passes us by. Then, we might develop a hunger to see more. Who knows what we might discover if we do that.

**When have you allowed yourself to stop and really see?**

Ian Manson



Lent 2025

Day Nine

***“The heart is the inner face of your life. The human journey strives to make this inner face beautiful. It is here that love gathers within you. Love is absolutely vital for a human life. For love alone can awaken what is divine within you. In love, you grow and come home to your self. When you learn to love and let yourself be loved, you come home to the hearth of your own spirit. You are warm and sheltered.”***

**John O'Donohue**

We all like the idea of having a beautiful face. Some put more effort into this than others, and perhaps some start with more natural advantages than others. The face is what others see of us. It is the version of us that we present to the outer world, and it is nice if we can make a good impression. Yet just as we have a face which looks away from us, there also a side which can only be seen from within. We don't always pay as much attention to it, but it is far more important for our well-being.

I like the idea the heart being our inner face, the place where all the love we receive gathers, for love is indeed vital. It is the love that we have gathered up which makes us beautiful, and which lets us feel at home in ourselves.

**What experiences of being loved make you feel warm and sheltered?**

Ian Manson

Lent 2025

Day Ten

***“Your beloved and your friends were once strangers. Somehow at a particular time, they came from the distance toward your life. Their arrival seemed so accidental and contingent. Now your life is unimaginable without them.***

***Similarly, your identity and vision are composed of a certain constellation of ideas and feelings that surfaced from the depths of within you. To lose these now would be to lose yourself.”***

**John O'Donohue**

There is a sense in which it feels as if we don't change at all over the years. We feel like more or less the same person we have always been and that life just rolls on in its inevitable course. That however is an illusion. If you think about the people who have been most important in your life, it will quickly become clear that many of them were not always a part of our lives.

If we accept that new people and new interests have come into our lives; people and things which we could not imagine before they emerged into our experience, then it becomes clear that the future is also open to such new developments. There are parts of our personality still waiting to be brought to the surface; an endless range of possibilities for us to grow into who we can become.

**Who or what has come into your life which you now can't  
Imagine never having known?**

Ian Manson

Lent 2025

Day Eleven

***“When love awakens in your life, it is like the dawn breaking within you. Where before there was anonymity, now there is intimacy; where before there was fear, now there is courage; where before in your life there was awkwardness, now there is a rhythm of grace and gracefulness. When love awakens in your life, it is like a rebirth, a new beginning.”***

**John O'Donohue**

Awakening, rebirth, new beginnings, these are ideas which have always been at the heart of the hope offered by religious teaching. They can sound distant and remote – relevant only for mystics or those who have come to the darkest end of their despair. Yet such experiences are more common than we might recognise, right at the core of our human life.

Perhaps the most obvious example is the experience of love – discovering it where we had not known it before, having it explode out from us with a force which we can neither comprehend nor control. Once love is discovered and experienced it changes our outlook and our priorities. It changes the way we think about ourselves. These changes are so all embracing that only words like awakening and rebirth can get close to capturing it.

**When has love awakened in your life?**

Ian Manson

Lent 2025

Day Twelve

***“The art of love discloses the special and sacred identity of the other person. Love is the only light that can truly read the secret signature of the other person's individuality and soul. Love alone is literate in the world of origin”***

**John O'Donohue**

Love is such a small word for such a big thing. The variety of ways in which we use it can almost seem to belittle it, much as we use the word “God” to mean so many different ideas. Here we are invited to think of one of the less usual aspects of love – love as light which allows us to see things which we cannot see without it.

They say that love is blind, at least in the sense that the strength of feeling and desire can blind us to the faults of the beloved. Yet it surely also opens our eyes to see what is lovely and unique and precious in the other – things we can never perceive in the same way if we look only through the filter of our normal prejudices and fears. If we could learn to use love in that way, how much wonder might be waiting to be discovered in every person we encounter.

**How can you practice the art of love?**

Ian Manson

Lent 2025

Day 13

***“I would love to live like a river flows, carried by the surprise of its own unfolding.”***

**John O'Donohue**

The older I get, the more I discover that I am a creature of routine. While I will complain readily enough about things being dull and nothing new happening, I actually enjoy calm familiarity and a degree of certainty. The changes brought about by lockdown, and the widely expressed desire to ‘get back to normal’ suggest that I might not be alone. The unexpected is not always welcome and surprises are not always of the good variety.

Yet there is also something in me – and again I suspect that I am not alone, which would love to be less anxious, more open to going with the flow and simply enjoying whatever I am led into. The metaphor of a river, flowing enthusiastically round every corner, as if excited to see what comes next, carries a sense of freedom and fun which seem attractive even to me. I too would love to live like that.

**What kind of faith would help you to be less anxious?**

Ian Manson

Lent 2025

Day Fourteen

***“Consumerism is the worship of the god of quantity; advertising is its liturgy. Advertising is schooling in false longing.”***

**John O'Donohue**

I can remember giving talks on the dangers of our constant exposure to advertising back in the 1980's. Even then it was becoming clear that its constant messages telling us that something was lacking in our lives would have a corrosive effect on the human soul. We might reflect on how much more sophisticated these messages have become today, and how much accurately more targeted at our vulnerabilities.

We all know that the act of purchasing something can only ever, at best, give a very passing sense of satisfaction, and how our environment has paid the price for our constant desire for new things. If we do sense something lacking in our lives, we might do well to ponder the root causes, and what steps we might take to find a better balance. It is unlikely to cost very much, at least not in terms of money.

***When are you tempted to buy things which you don't really need?***

Ian Manson