

This meditation is from Nathan D. Mitchell, from the booklet, *Daybreaks: Daily Reflections for Lent and Easter* (by Liguori Publications).

*A Reflection on the Fifth Week of Lent*

## Counting the Cost

The biblical Book of Daniel is famous mainly for two images: the ominous “writing on the wall,” and the “fiery furnace” in which three young Jewish men were thrown by order of King Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 5; 3:16–23). Hearing these passages today, our thoughts almost instinctively turn to the smoking ovens of Auschwitz and Dachau, camps (among many) where the brutal Nazi genocide against Jews was systematically carried out during World War II. Years before that tragedy unfolded, British poet and novelist D. H. Lawrence had wondered out loud whether Christians are willing to be burnt to hot, floating ash. If we’re not, Lawrence warned, we’ll never really change. The point of his desperate, terrifying imagery was, I think, to urge us to consider the high price of conversion—to prod us into asking whether we’re really willing to pay that price. For deep and abiding change is something many of us resist out of fear or belligerence. “I’d rather be right than be happy,” a friend of mine likes to say. “I’ll change, but believe me, whatever I let go of will have claw marks all over it!”

Yet Jesus urged us to “lose life to find it,” and Matthew 11:12 records his unsettling, cryptic comment about the “kingdom of heaven” that “suffers violence.” It’s no coincidence that Jesus asked us to say, “Thy kingdom come,” knowing full well that if God’s reign truly begins, the world as we know it will blow apart. Christian faith was never meant to be a pleasant stroll in the park or “cheap grace” that refuses to count the cost of discipleship. Jesus taught us to pray with a fire in the head and a fire in the belly.

*Pray as if your life depends on it; it does.*