

Finstagram for Lent (Matthew 4:1-11)

In lieu of giving up social media, *adding* a "Finsta" account could be a spiritual practice for Lent.

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During the 40 days of Lent, many friends "fast" from Facebook or Instagram until they return with the Hallelujahs on Easter Sunday. The practice of stepping away from our curated, digital selves during Lent resonates with Jesus' call in Matthew 6 to focus less on being seen by others.

In lieu of giving up social media, *adding* a "Finsta" account could be a spiritual practice for Lent. According to *The Guardian*, a "Finstagram" or Finsta is "essentially a fake, second Instagram account meant for a small, private audience that features an unfiltered experience of a user's life."

A Finsta limits access to a few chosen followers. It can feature pictures of users without makeup or in awkward poses and expressions. A Finsta is where we ask vulnerable questions about our life choices and where we hope to receive an honest, unfiltered comment from trusted friends. A Finsta adds authenticity to our digital presence.

The irony of the Finsta is that we have to label it as fake in order to risk its vulnerability. Calling it fake reminds us that living unfiltered is scary. We are at the mercy of others. Will they respond with grace or judgment?

In this week's Gospel reading, Jesus chooses to enter a time of unfiltered reality, retreating from society to the vulnerable exposure of the wilderness. There, the devil

preys upon his potential weaknesses—and Jesus, three times, denies the devil’s request to follow the devil’s curated, glossy Instagram view of human accomplishment and worth.

This time of spiritual preparation helps Jesus clarify how and when to present a cultivated version of himself to the world—and when and where to be vulnerable. Jesus’ ministry, death, and resurrection will have both Insta and Finsta moments.

Instagram would serve Jesus well:

- During his interactions with the crowds (#watertowine #fishes&loaves).
- At his baptism, featuring the skies parting and a voice from heaven, with dove-filter added and John the Baptist tagged.
- At the Mount of Transfiguration, with cloud emoji and Moses and Elijah tagged.
- At the empty tomb, with Mary taking a selfie with the gardener (#notthegardner #heisrisen).

Finsta would serve Jesus well:

- With the inner circle of 12, for Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, and for Mary Magdalene #talkabouttheparableslater.
- For the 40 days in the wilderness, where fasting precludes staged photos of dinner plates.
- In the Garden of Gethesmane, where even Jesus’ invited followers left him on “read.”
- For asking such vulnerable questions as, “Who do you say that I am?”
- In the upper room, where the question, “Is it I, Lord?” awaits Jesus’ comment.
- For the womens’ vigil at the cross and pre-dawn walk to the tomb.

Life, in the flesh and in digital form, involves both public and private versions of our selves. Following Jesus’ footsteps into the wilderness, Lent invites us to be less public. We devote 40 days to fasting from being seen by others—to seeing ourselves more fully in God’s eyes.

God loves our authentic, unfiltered selves. The world will tempt us to trust the glossy, edited versions of our lives to the point of worshipping them. These 40 days we can repent of those self-serving ways and, instead, focus on the picture of love and grace that God likes and shares with us.

God’s gracious gaze is for real.