

Weekend Readings & Reflections

March 6-7, 2022 – First Sunday of Lent

Reflection: In today's epic Gospel scene, Jesus relives in His flesh the history of Israel. We've already seen that, like Israel, Jesus has passed through water and been called God's beloved Son (see [Luke 3:22](#); [Exodus 4:22](#)). Now, as Israel was tested for forty years in the wilderness, Jesus is led into the desert to be tested for forty days and nights (see [Exodus 15:25](#)). He faces the temptations put to Israel: Hungry, He's tempted to grumble against God for food (see [Exodus 16:1-13](#)). As Israel quarreled at Massah, He's tempted to doubt God's care (see [Exodus 17:1-6](#)). When the Devil asks for His homage, He's tempted to do what Israel did in creating the golden calf (see [Exodus 32](#)). Jesus fights the Devil with the Word of God, three times quoting from Moses' lecture about the lessons Israel was supposed to learn from its wilderness wanderings (see [Deuteronomy 8:3](#); [6:16](#), [12-15](#)). Why do we read this story on the first Sunday of Lent? Because like the biblical sign of forty (see [Genesis 7:12](#); [Exodus 24:18](#); [34:28](#); [1 Kings 19:8](#); [Jonah 3:4](#)), the forty days of Lent are a time of trial and purification. Lent is to teach us what we hear over and over in today's readings. "Call upon me, and I will answer," the Lord promises in today's Psalm. Paul promises the same thing in today's Epistle (quoting [Deuteronomy 30:14](#); [Isaiah 28:16](#); [Joel 2:32](#)). This was Israel's experience, as Moses reminds his people in today's First Reading: "We cried to the Lord . . . and He heard." But each of us is tempted, as Israel was, to forget the great deeds He works in our lives, to neglect our birthright as His beloved sons and daughters. Like the litany of remembrance Moses prescribes for Israel, we should see in the Mass a memorial of our salvation, and "bow down in His presence," offering ourselves in thanksgiving for all He has given us.

OPENING PRAYER

Leader: Welcome our discussion on the First Sunday of Lent. Let's begin by praying from Psalm 5:

All: Hear my words, O Lord; listen to my sighing. Hear my cry for help, my king, my God! To you I pray, O LORD; at dawn you will hear my cry; at dawn I will plead before you and wait. You are not a god who delights in evil; no wicked person finds refuge with you; the arrogant cannot stand before you. You hate all who do evil... But I can enter your house/ because of your great love. I can worship in your holy temple because of my reverence for you, Lord. Guide me in your justice because of my foes; make straight your way before me. Amen. (Psalm 5:2-6, 8-9)



Leader: It sometimes surprises people to learn that the first thing that happened to Jesus after his baptism was that he was tempted by the evil one. What are some of the ways that we are tempted today? Maybe not specific temptations like eating too much chocolate, but some of the more general ways that all of us can be tempted to follow the ways of this world more than the ways of Christ. The Scripture Readings for today focus on the temptations of Jesus, but even more, they speak to us of the power God gives us to overcome evil. Reflect on this as we listen to today's video.

(Play the video on [FORMED.org](#) - [Opening the Word – First Sunday in Lent \(Year C\)](#))

FIRST READING ~ Deuteronomy 26:4-10 ~

Moses spoke to the people, saying: “The priest shall receive the basket from you and shall set it in front of the altar of the LORD, your God. Then you shall declare before the Lord, your God, ‘My father was a wandering Aramean who went down to Egypt with a small household and lived there as an alien. But there he became a nation great, strong, and numerous. When the Egyptians maltreated and oppressed us, imposing hard labor upon us, we cried to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and he heard our cry and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. He brought us out of Egypt with his strong hand and outstretched arm, with terrifying power, with signs and wonders; and bringing us into this country, he gave us this land flowing with milk and honey. Therefore, I have now brought you the firstfruits of the products of the soil which you, O LORD, have given me.’ And having set them before the LORD, your God, you shall bow down in his presence.”

The book of Deuteronomy shares one of the most important statements of faith in the Old Testament. It was spoken every time a person gave their offering to the priest in the Temple. It reminded them of their identity and how God saved them. Bringing the tithe (tenth) of the harvest to the temple acknowledged God’s care and provision.

- How could you express this religious practice of thankfulness – ‘tithing’ (giving a 10th)?

Deuteronomy 26: 12-15 invites giving to the levite (priest), the foreigner (refugee), the orphan and the widow (those without family and financial support). This is at the heart of the Lenten practice of almsgiving.

- How generous will you be in giving of your time, talent, money, compassion... this Lent as a way of thanksgiving for what God has given you?

SECOND READING ~ Romans 10:8-13 ~

Brothers and sisters: What does Scripture say? The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart—that is, the word of faith that we preach—, for, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. For the Scripture says, no one who believes in him will be put to shame. For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all, enriching all who call upon him. For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Paul’s letter to the Romans is a careful explanation of how we are made right with God. Justification by keeping the law was deeply ingrained in Jewish consciousness and history. Paul reminds us that it is faith in God’s covenantal relationship with us in Jesus that saves us.

- In a relationship, what is the difference between law and love? Do you enjoy/love your relationship with God? Does a love relationship need to respect any law? What word or image would describe your relationship with God now as the journey of Lent begins?



GOSPEL ~ Luke 6:39-45~

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert for forty days, to be tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and when they were over he was hungry. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." Jesus answered him, "It is written, one does not live on bread alone." Then he took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a single instant. The devil said to him, "I shall give to you all this power and glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I may give it to whomever I wish. All this will be yours, if you worship me." Jesus said to him in reply, "It is written You shall worship the Lord, your God, and him alone shall you serve." Then he led him to Jerusalem, made him stand on the parapet of the temple, and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written: He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you, and: With their hands they will support you, lest you dash your foot against a stone." Jesus said to him in reply, "It also says, you shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test." When the devil had finished every temptation, he departed from him for a time.

Jesus in the desert provides us with the starting point of Lent.

- *Consider how you can create some 'desert' space in your life, away from distractions and noise, to be with God and discover your true self? What are some ways you can make this Lenten desert?*

Careful reflection on Jesus' temptations leads us to see a mirror conflict within ourselves between good and evil. Get bread for self. Seek power and reputation. Demand support from others. Prayer, Fasting and Almsgiving are practices during Lent to deconstruct our false self and reconstruct our true self. Almsgiving enables the hungry at our door and beyond to be fed and healed. Fasting turns us from worldly consumerism to clarity of purpose and compassion for others. Prayer tunes us into God's vision and voice.

- *From Jesus' temptations, which core temptation do you notice strongly at work in your life? Which Lenten practice do you need?*

MEDITATION

Are you ready to follow the Lord Jesus wherever he wishes to lead you? After Jesus' was baptized by John the Baptist at the River Jordan, he withdrew into the wilderness of Judea - a vast and mostly uninhabitable wilderness full of danger. Danger from scorching heat by day and extreme cold at night, danger from wild animals and scorpions, plus the deprivation of food and the scarcity of water.

Why did the Holy Spirit lead Jesus into such a lonely place - right after Jesus was anointed and confirmed by the Father for his mission as Messiah and Savior? Jesus was following the pattern which God had set for Moses and for Elijah - both were led on a forty-day journey of prayer and fasting to meet with God on his holy mountain (Exodus 24:18 and 1 Kings 19:8). God tested Moses and Elijah to prepare them for a prophetic mission - to speak God's word (Exodus 33:11; Deuteronomy 18:15; 34:10) and to lead God's people into the way of holiness and righteousness, a way marked by love of God and love of neighbor. While Moses and Elijah each prayed and fasted in the desert

wilderness of Sinai, God fed them with his life-giving word. Their time of solitude with God enabled them to be renewed in faith, hope, and love for the call God had given them. Jesus likewise went into the wilderness to prepare himself for the mission entrusted to him by spending forty days and nights in solitude and prayer to his Father in heaven.

Luke tells us that at the end of Jesus' forty days in the wilderness one visitor came out to tempt him. Luke describes this tempter as the devil (Luke 4:1), who is also called the father of lies (John 8:44), Satan (Luke 10:18), and the spiritual ruler and god of this world (John 12:31; 2 Corinthians 4:4). He is the same deceiver who tempted Adam and Eve in the Garden of Paradise (Genesis 3). Why did Satan tempt Jesus at the end of his lengthy period of fasting? Satan knew that Jesus was embarking on an important spiritual mission for the kingdom of God. Perhaps Satan saw an opportunity to strike while Jesus appeared more vulnerable in his physically and emotionally weakened condition due to his prolonged fasting and inner struggle over his particular call and mission. Satan undoubtedly thought he could persuade Jesus to choose his own path rather than the path his Father had chosen - a path that required self-renunciation, humility, and obedience to his Father's will. Jesus had to struggle with temptation, especially the temptation to choose his own way and to push aside the way his Father wanted him to go. This is the fundamental temptation which confronts each one of us as well. My way or God's way, my will or God's will.

The forty days of Lent is the annual retreat of the people of God in imitation of Jesus' forty days in the wilderness. We are called to journey with the Lord in a special season of prayer, fasting, almsgiving, repentance, and renewal as we prepare to celebrate the feast of Easter, the Christian Passover. The Lord gives us spiritual food and supernatural strength to seek his face and to prepare ourselves for spiritual combat and testing. We, too, must follow in the way of the cross in order to share in the victory of Christ's death and resurrection. As we begin this holy season of preparation and renewal, let's ask the Lord for a fresh outpouring of his Holy Spirit that we may grow in faith, hope, and love, and embrace his will more fully in our lives.

- *What lesson can we learn from Jesus' temptation in the wilderness? How can we hope to fight temptation and overcome sin in our own personal lives? Do you seek God's wisdom and guidance for overcoming sin and avoiding the near occasions of sin?*

CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: In closing, let us pray together:

ALL: Lord Jesus, your word is life and joy for me. Fill me with your Holy Spirit that I may have the strength and courage to embrace your will in all things and to renounce whatever is contrary to it. Amen.

Leader: (if time, let us offer up our intercessions ... St. Michael... Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be...)

[Opening reflection was shared from St. Paul Center at <https://stpaulcenter.com/studies-tools/sunday-bible-reflections>]

[video can be found at FORMED.ORG "Opening the Word". Additional reflections can be found at FORMED in "Opening the Word"]

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