

First Sunday of Lent - Lectionary: 24

Reading I - [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 first fruits 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.”

Responsorial Psalm - [Psalm 91:1-2, 10-11, 12-13, 14-15](#) R. (cf. 15b) *Be with me, Lord, when I am in trouble.*

Reading II - [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.”

Gospel - [Luke 4:1-13](#)

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.

Lent: A Pilgrimage of Reflection, Repentance, and Renewal

The life of a Christian is a sacred journey of sacred children of God. The journey will sometimes involve physically going from here to there, as it did for Abraham, Moses, and all the Apostles. But what is true for every pilgrim member of the Church, it will always be a spiritual journey and an adventure of deepening relationship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As well, it will always be characterized by reflection, repentance, and renewal. It will necessarily be transformative.

There will be some folks who journey with us our whole lives and others who come alongside us for only a short while. Most importantly, God will journey with each and every one of us. When you enter the deserts of desolation, God is with you. When you traverse the less traveled roads, God is with you. When you find yourselves enveloped by the cities of plenty and mired in the depths of temptation... God is with you.

No matter along what paths the journey to the heart of God takes you, or how long your particular journey might last, you will always encounter the same seasons along the way. There will be the season of anticipation of the Advent of our Lord, and the celebration of His coming to journey with us. There will be seasons of restful ordinariness, and of course the Triduum of love and sacrifice for our salvation, and the Easter Season of our hope and joy that follows. Thereafter, year after year we will pass through these seasons and will be invited to rediscover the riches of Christ which they contain. Each one, at some time in our lives, will be truly experienced for the first time with wonder and awe.

Lent, the 40 days of a Christian pilgrim's journey before Easter, is a time for us to prepare through penance for a fresh and ever more fruitful experience of our dying and rising in Christ. Of our baptism into the divine life of God. If, in past years, we allowed this season go by largely unnoticed, let this year be a second spring in your lives. Let it mean something more in your discipleship with Christ.

In times past, Lent was not viewed as a time to which we looked forward. Fasting and abstinence, not to mention other forms of penance, were in force and it was a serious business. Our attitudes to Lent tended to be gloomy and negative. Yet, then as now, Lent has always been a key period of the liturgical year that marks our mortal journey to our Holy homeland. In fact, that is what we prayed for in the Opening Prayer of today's Mass: *Grant almighty God, through the observance of holy Lent, that we may grow in understanding of the riches hidden in Christ and by worthy conduct pursue their effects.* Really, the whole purpose of Lent is beautifully summarized in that prayer—to understand the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus and to live that out in our own lives. Lent is like an annual retreat.

Like being on retreat, these 40 days of Lenten observance, can draw the unwanted attention of the enemy of God. Some of those days and nights might involve spiritual warfare, and the need to respond to various forms that the attack might take and to know that we fight with God alongside us. We should pay attention to how Jesus was sustained during desert days and the ways he fought the author of lies. Jesus' responses to the devil remind us that true sustenance comes not from earthly bread but from the Word of God. His steadfastness in the face of temptation serves as a model for us, showing that reliance on God's word is essential in overcoming our struggles. We must be like him during our own desert days of Lenten observance. As well, prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

In our first reading from Deuteronomy, each person is asked to recall and reflect upon their deliverance as they bring their thanksgiving offering to the Lord. They acknowledge the burdens faced and how God responded with a mighty hand when they cried out. Moses, speaking to the Israelites at the end of their forty years wandering in the desert, prepares them for their new life in the Promised Land. The Lenten

Season must also be marked in our hearts by similar recollections and reflections upon the ways in which God is with us, has saved us, and will prepare us for eternal life in the promised land of our hope.

The words of the psalmist today are consoling and affirming, confident that God's presence among us will protect us and reminds us of the promises of salvation for those who trust in God. For those whose shelter is the Most High God and in whose shade we find refuge, we are assured that we will find safety and deliverance. St. Paul, taking a deeper dive into the nature of God's presence with us, emphasizes that whosoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. God will always be at work, if we allow it, strengthening our faith and belief, drawing us to cling to the Lord and trust in the promises of our salvation.

"When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time", but the battle with evil was not over for Jesus. With us too, the enemy of God will never stop, the battle against evil, though it may wax and wane, will never end. The selfishness, the greed, the anger and hostility, the jealousy and resentment, above all the desire to have rather than to share or to control rather than to serve will continually be among our greatest struggles. Our only lasting and most powerful successes in life won't be what we achieve in building palaces or empires, but rather in building a society that is more loving and just, based on the message of Jesus, a message of truth and integrity, of love and compassion, of freedom and peace.

In the gospel today, the Devil tempts Jesus. He does this by proposing three ways to put something else before God. *Comfort-Seeking. Pride. Vanity.* Jesus shows us how to put God first. Every baptized person in this Church is member of the mystical Body of Christ united by the Eucharist unites us with God and with each other. So, when we put another person first, we're putting God first. And Lent is a perfect time to renew this effort, counting on God's help. The Catechism says that when we receive the Body of Christ and say "Amen," we're saying something amazing. We're saying: "Yes, I believe that I belong to Christ, and I believe that everyone else in this church also belongs to him." That means that we have a responsibility to others: we serve Christ in them. In fact, the Benedictine monks have a saying: "When the guest comes, Christ comes."

What can we do this week to put others first? There's a time of silence after communion. We can use this time to ask Jesus to show us one person we can put first this week. Maybe it's a spouse or a coworker or a friend who needs support. We can resolve to pray for that person each day this week. And then we could pick one way to reach out to him or her this week. When Jesus is tempted in the desert, he puts his Father first. Jesus will give us the strength – all we have to do is ask. God is with us.

Reflection Questions

1. Discuss the significance of the desert experience in the context of Lent, drawing parallels between Jesus' time in the desert and the spiritual journey of contemporary Christians during the Lenten season.
2. Analyze the role of remembrance and reflection, as highlighted in the reading from Deuteronomy, and explain how these practices can enrich one's Lenten journey and foster a deeper connection with God.
3. Explore the concept of spiritual warfare during Lent, examining the temptations and struggles individuals may face and offering strategies for overcoming these challenges through prayer, fasting, and reliance on the Word of God.
4. Discuss the relationship between receiving the Eucharist and our responsibility to others, as emphasized in the text, and provide examples of how individuals can put others first during Lent, thereby embodying the message of Christ.
5. Examine the theme of pilgrimage as it relates to Lent, exploring the idea that the Christian life is a journey of deepening relationship with God and discussing how Lent serves as a specific season for reflection, repentance, and renewal along this path.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Lent:** The 40-day period of reflection, repentance, and renewal observed by Christians before Easter, commemorating Jesus' time in the desert.
- **Penance:** Voluntary self-punishment inflicted as an expression of repentance for wrongdoing.
- **Abstinence:** The practice of refraining from indulging in certain pleasures or activities, often associated with fasting or self-discipline.
- **Almsgiving:** The act of giving money or goods to the poor or needy, as an act of charity and compassion.
- **Triduum:** The three days before Easter: Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday.
- **Eucharist:** The Christian sacrament commemorating the Last Supper by consecrating bread and wine.
- **Mystical Body of Christ:** The spiritual union of all Christians as members of one body, with Christ as the head.
- **Spiritual Warfare:** The ongoing struggle between good and evil, often experienced as internal battles against temptation and sin.
- **Liturgical Year:** The cycle of seasons and feasts observed by the Church, marking significant events in the life of Christ and the history of salvation.
- **Repentance:** Sincere regret or remorse for one's sins or wrongdoings, often accompanied by a commitment to change.
- **Vanity:** Excessive pride in or admiration of one's own appearance or achievements.