

LOOKING AT LIFE THROUGH THE LENS OF THE GOSPEL



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FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

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Luke 4:1 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, ² where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. ³ The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.” ⁴ Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’”

Luke 4:5 Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶ And the devil said to him, “To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. ⁷ If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” ⁸ Jesus answered him, “It is written,

‘Worship the Lord your God,
and serve only him.’”

Luke 4:9 Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, ¹⁰ for it is written,

‘He will command his angels concerning you,
to protect you,’

¹¹ and

‘On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’”

¹² Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” ¹³ When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

Lent

In the past Lent was often seen as a time to look down on oneself. Words such as temptation, evil; sin and guilt were often dominant, leaving some people in darkness and despair. This was extremely damaging for many. Thankfully, today we are trying to let go of such language and see Lent for what it really is, a time for transformation and encounter. Indeed, for some people today, it is one of their favourite Church seasons! New Year resolutions are probably out of the window by the time Lent comes around, so in a real sense it brings us the opportunity of a new beginning, a chance to start again. Lent offers us a time for deep reflection, and for those of us who hear and read the Gospel each week during this season, the texts offer a richness that can bring freshness to our lives.

We read on the First Sunday of Lent that our first stop is the wilderness. Here we embrace three tools to assist us: prayer, fasting and almsgiving. A suggestion for this season might be to spend more time with God’s Word, to give up some luxury and to either donate what you can to your favourite charity or give your time to something or someone. These practices help us to focus and to grow in deeper awareness of what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

The Spirit that led Jesus to and through the desert also guided him in times of struggle. So too with us. She moves in silent, unexpected and mysterious ways. awakening us. Be more attentive to her presence during Lent!

TRÍONA DOHERTY & JANE MELLETT—Go Deeper

Lent is a time of repentance, a time to set aside the usual stuff of life in order to take stock of where we are and where we want to go. It is, therefore, no accident that Lent begins with a reflection on Jesus’ time in the desert. In keeping with a central theme of his gospel, Luke says that Jesus was filled with the Spirit and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. For Luke, the presence of the Spirit is the evidence that God is with Jesus and that Jesus is from God. It is the Spirit that allows him to recognise the temptations of the devil for what they are, and it is the Spirit that guides him into his rejection of the temptation. This is the same for his disciples; we can only follow Jesus by an awareness of his Spirit within us. All our Lenten endeavour will be just a waste of time and effort if we are not guided by the Spirit in what we do.

SEAB GOAN—Let the Reader Understand, Year C

According to the Gospels, the temptations experienced by Jesus are not, properly speaking, of the moral order. They are proposals the devil makes him so as to mislead him in the way he understands and carries out his mission. So his reaction serves as a model for our moral behaviour, but also warns us not to be misled about the mission Jesus entrusted to his followers.

How can we be a church faithful to Jesus if we are not aware of the most dangerous temptations that can lead us astray from his project and his manner of living?

In the first temptation Jesus refuses to use God to serve his own interests. He will not use the Father to gratify his ego. He will be nourished by the living word of God. Probably the most serious temptation of Christians of rich countries is this: to use religion to add to their material well-being, to drain Christianity of compassion by being deaf to the voice of God who continues to cry out in the poor of the world.

In the second temptation Jesus refuses to gain power and glory by resorting to the abuses, lies and injustices which are the tools of the devil. The kingdom of God is to be imposed on anyone, but offered with love.

In these times of loss of control over society, it is tempting for the church to attempt to recover the power and glory it had in past ages. In doing so we lose an historic opportunity to embark upon a new experiment in humble service and of accompanying men and women today as brothers and sisters much in need of love and hope.

In the third temptation, Jesus refuses to fulfil his mission by having recourse to easy success and self-display. He will be among his own as one who serves. It will always be a temptation for some to use the space religion provides to seek reputation, fame and privilege. Few things are as ridiculous in following Jesus as ostentation and seeking to be honoured. They harm the church and drain it of the truth.

JOSÉ A PAGOLA—Following in the Footsteps of Jesus, Year C

The story of Jesus' temptation reveals to us the deepest thing about him: he had total trust in his heavenly Father. This is why the incident is placed at the very beginning of his public life. The evangelists are telling us that he chose this path and he would remain faithful to it through all the ups and downs of his ministry.

Telling the story in the form of 'temptations' does two things:

- Jesus' attitude is highlighted since it is set in contrast with other possible attitudes;
- we are reminded that for Jesus trust was a free and deliberate choice, as it is for every human being: he chose to trust.

In meditating on the temptations, feel free to focus on the one that appeals to you and remain with it until you find yourself identifying deeply with it. Eventually you will find that all three are really variations on the one temptation not to be totally trusting.

The story has an introduction in verses 1 and 2 and a conclusion in verse 13. You might like to spend some time on these verses as they are very significant.

MICHEL DE VERTEUIL—Lectio Divina on the Sunday Gospels, Year C

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. The temptations were a step for Jesus in his growing understanding of his mission and of his relationship with his Father. Can you look back at some painful experiences and acknowledge that you have grown through them, both in your knowledge of yourself, and in your relationships with others and with God? Give thanks for the guidance of the Spirit of God in these times.

2. Sometimes, as with the COVID 19 pandemic, we are tested by events outside our control. What did you learn about yourself during the pandemic? Is there some way in which you grew through the experience?

3. Behind each of the temptations in the gospel story is a basic temptation to lose trust in God. Jesus resisted this because he recognised his complete dependence on his Father. How have you come to recognise your life and the whole world as gifts from God?

4. One can enter into each of the temptations singly. There may be ones that you have experienced:

- the temptation to give priority to bodily needs and satisfactions
- the temptation to power
- the temptation to seek to be the centre of attention.

How have you grown through wrestling with these temptations?

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

The days of Spring lengthen and Lent echoes nature, inviting us as well to a new springtime of faith. As in farming and gardening, there is work to be done if new growth is to flourish or to happy at all. We have to look back and see what was done well and what has, in effect, died off. We need to make space by clearing the ground and looking at ourselves honestly. It would be good to identify what will feed and sustain us during this journey from Ash Wednesday to the new birth of Easter.