

# Scripture Study

First Sunday of Lent – Cycle C



## Opening prayer

Deuteronomy 26:4-10

(Ps 91:1-2, 10-15)

Romans 10:8-13

**Luke 4:1-13**

## Overview of the Gospel:

- In this Sunday's reading, Jesus has just come from being baptized by John the Baptist. It was here that the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove descended upon him, and God's voice from heaven identified him as his beloved Son (Luke 3:21 and following).
- Immediately after this he was led by the Spirit (Mark 1:12 says he was *driven*) into the desert to be tempted by Satan. His fasting for 40 days calls to mind many significant Old Testament events that also involved 40 days—Noah in the ark (Genesis 7:12), Moses on Mt. Sinai (Exodus 24:18), and Jonah in Nineveh (Jonah 3:4).
- Jesus' temptation mirrors that of notable Old Testament figures (Adam, Moses, the Israelites in the wilderness) who were also tempted. The difference is that Jesus is successful in resisting, atoning for the failure of those who came before.
- Jesus shows that he can empathize with us in that he was subject to temptation just as we are (see Hebrews 2:18; 4:15). He also shows us how to resist the devil.

## Questions:

- Why were the temptations directed at Jesus immediately after he was affirmed by God at his baptism (Luke 3:22)?
- In each temptation, what was its appeal? Its price? How does Jesus resist them? How are the three temptations similar? Different?
- What does it mean to you that all the power and glory of the kingdoms of the world have been given to Satan (verses 5-6. See also John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11)?
- If the devil had three shots at you, what temptations would he use? What resources does God give to help us resist?
- In verse 12, Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:16. What does it mean to "tempt the Lord, your God"? How is that different from "taking a step out in faith"? What is your own experience in this regard?
- In the First Reading, on the verge of their entry into the Promised Land, Moses reminds the Israelites of all that God has done for them to bring them to this point. How are they to show their gratitude to God once they have taken possession of the land? How do you show gratitude to the Lord for all the good he has done for you? How do you "give to God what belongs to God" (Matthew 21:22)?

**Catechism of the Catholic Church: §§ 538-540; 2096; 2119**

## Closing prayer

*A man who governs his passions is master of the world. We must either command them, or be enslaved by them. It is better to be a hammer than an anvil. -St. Dominic*

**Remember to read and meditate on the daily Mass readings found in the bulletin!**

# Jesus Fasted Forty Days and Forty Nights and Was Tempted by the Devil

**Gospel Reading:** Luke 4:1-13

**Meditation:** What motivated Jesus to spend 40 days and nights of solitude, prayer and fasting in the Judean wilderness? This desert landscape was largely uninhabitable and was full of dangers for anyone who dared to venture in it for long. 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.

For the chosen people of Israel the desert was a place of testing, encounter, and renewal. When the Israelites were freed from slavery in Egypt, they wandered 40 years in the wilderness. This was seen as a time of purification and preparation for entry into the Promised Land. Moses went to the mountain of the Lord at Sinai and stayed there for 40 days and nights in prayer and fasting (Exodus 24:18). Elijah, after he was fed with bread from heaven, journeyed without any food for 40 days to the mountain of God. (1 Kings 19:8). Jesus journeyed without any food to the wilderness for 40 days to prepare himself for the mission that the Father had sent him to accomplish.

Why did Jesus choose such a barren, lonely place for an intense and long period of sustained prayer and fasting? What compelled Jesus to seek solitude, away from his family and friends, for such a lengthy period? Was it simply a test to prepare him for his mission? Or did Satan want to lure him into a trap? The word *tempt* in English usually means to entice someone to do what is wrong or forbidden. The scriptural word used here also means *test* in the sense of proving and purifying someone to see if there are ready for the task at hand.. On many occasions God tested Abraham to prove his faith and to strengthen his hope in God's promises. Abraham obeyed willingly even when God asked him to sacrifice Isaac, the



son of promise. When the Israelites were sorely tested in Egypt for more than 400 years, they did not forget God. They kept God's word and remembered his promise to bring them freedom from their enemies.

Jesus was no exception to this pattern of testing. He went to the desert without food or shelter. Adam and Eve had everything they needed in the Garden of Paradise. But they ate of the forbidden fruit out of disobedience because they trusted in themselves rather than in God. They were cast out of Paradise and driven into the wilderness. Jesus freely enters the wilderness in order to regain Paradise for those who lost it. Jesus refuses food to show his dependence on the bread of heaven, the word of God that would sustain him not only in his physical hunger, but in his hour of temptation as well. When Satan tempts Jesus to turn stones into bread, Jesus replies with the words of scripture, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (quote from Deuteronomy 8:3; see also Matthew 4:4).

Where did Jesus find the strength to survive the desert's harsh conditions and the tempter's seduction? He fed on God's word and found strength in doing his Father's will. Satan will surely tempt us and he will try his best to get us to choose our will over God's will. If he can't make us renounce our faith or sin mortally, he will then try to get us to make choices that will lead us, little by little, away from what God wants for us.

Jesus was tempted like us and he overcame sin not by his own human effort but by the grace and strength which his Father gave to him. He had to renounce his will for the will of his Father. He succeeded because he wanted to please his Father and he trusted that his Father would give him the strength to overcome the obstacles that stood in the way. Luke says that Jesus was "full of the Holy Spirit" (Luke 4:1). When tempted by the devil Jesus did not try to fight his adversary on his own human strength. He relied on the power which the Spirit gave him. Jesus came to overthrow the evil one who held us captive to sin and fear of death (Hebrews 2:14). His obedience to his Father's will and his willingness to embrace the cross reversed the curse of Adam's disobedience. His victory over sin and death won for us not only pardon for our sins but adoption as sons and daughters of God.

How can we overcome sin and oppression in our personal lives? The Lord Jesus gives us his Holy Spirit to help us in our weakness (Romans 8:26) and to be our guide and consoler in temptation and testing (1 Corinthians 10:13). The Lord gives grace to the humble who acknowledge their dependence on him (James 4:6) and he helps us to stand against the attacks of our enemy, Satan, who seeks to destroy us (1 Peter 5:8-10; Ephesians 6:10-18). The Lord Jesus is ever ready to pour out his Spirit upon us that we may have the strength and courage we need to resist sin and to reject the lies and deceits of Satan. God wants us to "fight the good fight of the faith" (1 Timothy 6:12) with the power and strength which comes from the Holy Spirit. Do you rely on the Lord for your strength and help?

*"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."*

