



## 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent: February 21, 2010

*Theme: Get your food and strength from God and resist temptation.*

**Reading I: Deuteronomy: 26, 4-10-** Author: Composite Date: ~ 1406 BCE

**Background:** One of the five canonical books of Moses, or the Pentateuch. This is perhaps the most important passages of the Old Testament, Pentateuch. What Christ's death and resurrection are to the New Testament, the Exodus is to the Old Testament. These are the basic messages of the two canons. In each case the mighty acts of God lead to a confession of faith, a recital of those mighty acts.

*Theme: The Lord heard our cry and brought us out of the desert.*

**Question:** When has the Lord heard your cry and given hope in a dire situation ?

**Reading II:** 1 Romans: 15: 12, 16-20, Author: Paul Date: ~ 55 AD

**Background:** The unity of the Church lies in this common, basic confession: God has raised Jesus from the dead and made him Lord.

*Theme: Everyone who calls on the Lord will be saved.*

**Question:** Do you accept all who believe in Jesus?

**Gospel:** Luke: 4: 1-13 Author – Luke, the Physician Date: ~ 80-85 AD

**Background:** Luke's Temptation story is similar to Matthew's. The only notable differences are the rearrangement of the second and third temptations, and the statement that the devil left Jesus "until an opportune time" (v. 13). The ministry of Jesus is the "Satan-free" period; the devil returns to assail Jesus in the passion (22:3). Thus, Luke deliberately links the temptation story with the passion. Luke's purpose in this temptation story is to present Jesus precisely as the kind of person John the Baptist predicted: the "more powerful one" Note: The Holy Spirit is the one who led Jesus into the desert to be tempted. But Jesus refuses to wield his power against God.

*Theme: The devil will tempt you. Remember: Get your food and strength only from God, and do not test him.*

**Questions:** O Was Jesus ever tempted? When do you feel tempted?

- o How do Baptism & Lent make you stronger? Why do we do it again and again?
- o Why should we fast?
- o Who does God claim you to be and how do you remain true to the Jesus' call to holiness?

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**Reading I:** [Dt 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.”

**Reading II:** [Rom 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

### [Lk 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

*1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent :*

*Feb. 21, 2010*

***Fr. John Kavanaugh***

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***Temptations: Not by bread alone***

How shall we deal with the awesome contingency of our lives? We so much want to make a difference, to leave our mark. Yet we know we disappear into the vast reaches of space and time. We die and go to ashes. Such is our creaturehood.

Ernest Becker wrote in *The Denial of Death* that the preeminent human temptation is to escape or repress the truth of our frail skin. We avoid the desert, the loneliness, the loss of familiar support, the grand stillness. If we go into the wilderness, we will be reminded of the great hunger. We will be dwarfed by the earth's mighty movements.

**Enter distraction.** If we keep ourselves ceaselessly preoccupied, we might be spared the pain and the pained. We need not pay attention to the terrible precariousness of our condition. We need not embark on the quest for an answer to our absolute lack. Perhaps if we entertain ourselves to death, we may be able to divert our way through life.

A tempting tactic: turn the stone into bread. No more yearning for the fullness. We can have it at our beck and call. By the snap of our fingers we fill the hole at the bottom of our being.

Another option: power. If we could only control and dominate, then we need not fear the terrors of the night. And if that fails, we might devise some magic. The splendiferous event. Defy the laws of human gravity, the pull of earth. Scale the treacherous heights unharmed.

The temptations Jesus underwent were to escape from the mission of his humanity, to deny our dependent condition. Let him dodge the mortality he supposedly took upon himself. Let him be everything but human. He could take the world by storm, by the sheer force of impressiveness. After all, if he could turn stone to bread, what faith would we need? (He would, as a matter of record, change bread into his body, but only for eyes that see in the full risk of faith. Imagine the hosts of spellbound believers approaching the altar to receive a little homunculus body now formed out of bread: Shazzam! What an act!)

Why did he not, by command, grab all our empires by the neck, dwarfing Alexander and the Caesars? Our timid allegiance could be exacted, squeezed out of us. Why did he not dominate, grandiose earth king, our wobbly wills? Then he need never rely on the free gift of the human heart. He would just enchain it. He could recreate us in a new image: rigid robots, awestruck automatons. Imagine him, flying in stupendous spirals around our cathedrals. Surely he would be *Time's* man of every year. The biggest newsmaker imaginable. Let him be a superman or Captain Marvel, not a person of flesh and blood. Not a human whose whole sustenance would be the word of the one who sent him.

Jesus entered not only the desert, but the hunger as well. He was unguarded in the wilds of time, powerless before the raging logic of unleashed appetite. He was so embarrassingly common and little, so like us in every way but our sin, our escapes, our lies, our refusal to be what God made us to be.

He resisted the seduction. And the evil spirit left, to await another opportunity. It would appear again when the love would become almost unbearable, the wounds of our humanity agonizing. Finally, when he walked with us into the desert of our godforsaken dying, he gave us not escape, but those few reliant words of passage, "Into your hands I commend my spirit."

In some strange way, Christ utters the same commendation to us. He will not dazzle us. He will entrust his saving of us into our hands for free acceptance. As Dostoyevsky's Grand inquisitor in *The Brothers Karamazov* complained, this was Christ's big mistake. We would rather have the easy bread and showy circuses. We would prefer the domination of rigid authority over the terror of our free "yes" to him.

It is easy not to like Jesus' proposal for our salvation, since it requires us to enter with him yet more fully into our creature. He offers no way out from our wounds. He only gives us passage through them. And, halting before the journey, we are again tempted by the inquisitor's questions in the desert.

As for Dostoyevsky's Grand Inquisitor story, Jesus remains quiet in the face of the tyrant's reprimand that the mission has been all wrong. Jesus does not silence the liar. He does not cast the fraud from his throne. He merely kisses the man's cheek and goes back to the streets of history, searching out the prize for which he came: the free gift of a human heart, the commitment in faith, the acceptance of his passion, death, and resurrection.

No, neither bread nor magic will save us. It will be only, as Paul writes, by our entry into Christ's own act of total trust and abandonment, believing in our hearts that therein we ourselves are raised from the dead and delivered.

"Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.

**The devil made me do it.**

Now when the voice from heaven identified Jesus at his baptism as “my Son, the Beloved; with you I am *well pleased*” (Luke 3:22), all the spirits heard this compliment.

Every Mediterranean native knows what must and will happen next in Jesus’ life. Spirits will test him to determine whether the compliment is indeed true, and just in case it might be true, the spirits will try to make Jesus do something *displeasing* to God.

It is no surprise, then, that the very next scene in Jesus’ life that Luke presents is “the temptation.”

Jesus was full of the Holy Spirit. He was led by a good spirit into the wilderness, the normal habitat of spirits, where he did battle with an evil spirit, the devil.

Three times Jesus is tempted to do something that would make him a displeasing son. Three times Jesus replies with a quote from Scripture (Deut 8:3; 6:13; 6:16) to vanquish the temptation.

The devil also quotes Scripture to Jesus (Ps 91:11-12, the responsorial psalm for this Sunday) but still does not succeed in tripping him up. Jesus wins the contest, and the devil leaves him “until an opportune time” (see Luke 22:3).

Clearly, the story of Jesus’ victory over the devil is not intended by Luke as a model for baptized Christians who also have to battle against evil spirits. No Christian possesses the powers that Jesus is here tempted to misuse.

Luke’s purpose in this temptation story is to present Jesus precisely as the kind of person John the Baptist predicted: the “more powerful one” (Luke 3:16).

Indeed, later in this Gospel Jesus will describe himself and his activity with the same phrase: only a “more powerful one” or “one stronger” than the devil can cast out demons (Luke 11:22).

Those among Luke’s first readers who asked, “why should I believe in Jesus?” are given culturally appropriate answers.

Jesus displays an extraordinary degree of control over life and nature. He possesses an ability to safeguard and maintain his honor and avoid shame.

Until his arrest, trial, and death, no one—human or spirit—succeeds in shaming him, tripping him up, or causing him to fall from his stated position and goals.

He is indeed a “more powerful one.”

Americans in general do not believe that spirits cause them any problems. This cultural conviction is what made the comedian Flip Wilson’s character, Geraldine, so amusing as often as she resorted to her favorite excuse: “The devil made me do it!”

But Americans do understand power. They especially understand and resent abuse of power by those who should wield it for the benefit of others.

Scholars point out that in the Gospels Jesus wields no power at all except in regard to spirits and demons.

Viewed from this perspective, the story of Jesus’ refusal to abuse the power he had offers Americans something very relevant to ponder

## *Historical Commentary*

*~ John Chrysostom, 400 AD*

*Jesus was led by the Spirit through the wilderness where he was tempted.*

*Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil.* What does "then" mean? After the Spirit descended, after the voice from heaven said: *This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.* The amazing thing is that scripture says it was the Holy Spirit who led him there!

All that Jesus did and suffered was for our instruction.

He consented to be led into the desert and to do battle with the devil so that when the baptized were assailed by greater temptations after baptism than before they would not be troubled as though this were something unexpected, but would remain steadfast, bearing them all nobly.

You did not receive weapons so that you might sit at ease, but so that you might fight!  
The reasons God does not prevent the onslaught of temptations are these.

First, so that you may learn that you have now become much stronger;  
then, so that you may remain modest, for you will not be puffed up by the greatness of your gifts if temptations can humble you;  
next, because the wicked demon may doubt at first whether you have really renounced him and the test of temptation will convince him of your total desertion;  
fourth, to confirm you, who are now stronger and steadier than iron;  
fifth, to give you clear evidence of the treasures committed to you.

The devil would not have attacked you if he had not seen that you have been raised to a position of great honor. Notice where it was that the Spirit led Jesus—not into the city or the market place, but into the desert. Since Jesus wished to entice the devil he gave him his opportunity not only by his own hunger, but also by his choice of place. The devil usually attacks people when he sees them alone by themselves. He does not dare to do so when he sees them together with others.

It is for this reason especially that we should frequently meet with one another. If we do not we may become an easy prey for the devil.

And so, the devil finds Jesus in the desert, in a trackless wilderness. Consider how vile and wicked the devil's approach is, and what sort of opportunity he watches for. He does not come near when Jesus is fasting, but only when he is hungry. You should learn from this the great value of fasting and that no weapon is more powerful against the devil. After baptism you should not be filled with food and drink from a well-laden table, but should rather devote yourself to fasting.

Jesus fasted not because he himself had any need to do so, but to give us an example.

*(On Matthew 13, 1: PG 57,207-209)*

**John Chrysostom** (c.347-407) was born at Antioch and studied under Diodore of Tarsus, the leader of the Antiochene school of theology. After a period of great austerity as a hermit, he returned to Antioch where he was ordained deacon in 381 and priest in 386.

From 386 to 397 it was his duty to preach in the principal church of the city, and his best homilies, which earned him the title "Chrysostomos" or "the golden-mouthed," were preached at this time. In 397 Chrysostom became patriarch of Constantinople, where his efforts to reform the court, clergy, and people led to his exile in 404 and finally to his death from the hardships imposed on him.

Chrysostom stressed the divinity of Christ against the Arians and his full humanity against the Apollinarians, but he had no speculative bent. He was above all a pastor of souls, and was one of the most attractive personalities of the early Church

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#### PRE-PRAYERING

We have begun the liturgical preparation for the renewal of our baptisms and the reception of those seeking entrance into the Church. Lent might be the season of *prepositions* as well. *Does one decide to give up, or give over, or give to, or give back?*

The real meaning of Lent is about receiving *again*. Through the liturgical readings and prayers of these days, we are reminded of how God has handed to us, the Eternal Son with a loving desire that we allow the Gift to be handed to us again and again. We come to each Eucharist to be regathered and reminded of the conditions into which the Son was given and is now given to us. We prepare for our baptismal renewal by coming together as Church, as Christ's Body and admit our condition to which we receive Him once more.

#### REFLECTION

A large portion of the Book of Deuteronomy is dedicated to proper religious behavior within the Israelite community. For a very particular example, read verses eleven and twelve from the previous chapter to the chapter from which we hear in today's First Reading.

What we do hear is a bit of the history behind the liturgical actions prescribed by Moses. In several verses from this book and from the Book of Leviticus, the role of the priests is to receive the first-fruits of the harvests. Then there is a communal prayer reflective of the reasons the fruits are handed over. God, through Moses, rescued Israel and each person individually, from the slavery of Egypt. God handed over the soil as a gift and the people were to multiply as well. The first-born of the family and of the flock were likewise dedicated in thanksgiving to the handing-over God. So too as a sign of dependence and gratitude for the soil, the people were to hand over some of what they had received. After this holy prayer of remembrance and surrender, the liturgical gesture will be to physically bow down in reverence of the presence of the One and Holy God.

We hear the familiar drama of Jesus' being tempted by the devil. Jesus had received His being baptized according to Jewish custom. Again, as the rescued nation of Israel passed through water from slavery in a foreign land to freedom on their own holy soil, so each Jewish person would enter the Jordan river to then emerge cleansed from personal slavery and again stand renewed on the ground of freedom. During His being baptized, Jesus heard His identity as the Beloved One. He heard it, received it, and then began living it. What we hear is both the three temptations proffered by the devil and the three affirmations by Jesus of Who He knew Himself to be. So they are less temptations, but more a context for Jesus to begin showing up as Who He had heard He was.

The key word in the devil's presentation is "if". This conditional word moves the whole scene into the subjunctive, or "contrary to present fact" mood. Jesus remains "in the indicative", "affirmed actual fact" mood. The devil wants to offer or hand over to Jesus what is already in and of Jesus. The devil quotes scripture but says "if you are" and Jesus replies with scripture but denies the "if".

Much has been spoken and written about how we too are tempted with offerings of power, domination and possessions, as was Jesus. Those are worthy temptations about which to consider all right, but in this context of Lent, the more important reality to consider is how we are tempted to deny our relatives having been also baptized. Jesus lived out His "I am" because He had listened and believed He was the Beloved. We are preparing to enter again the water and grace of being reminded of who God in Christ has said in the indicative mood and spirit, who each of us really is.

Jesus could listen to all temptations, challenges, and invitations to disown Himself, to fall down, to be unreal, because He listened once and often, to the prayer of God over and within Him. Baptism, the Easter Sacrament, is our joining the Israelites as they entered often the river of remaining. Jesus lived Who He had received from God. We follow Jesus in and out of the same waters of indicative identity.

We in our turn follow Him also in and out of the temptational fields of our lives. We forget so easily. If we don't tell the stories of our pasts we will forget who we are. As young Irish children, we would visit our aged relatives often and especially on St. Patrick's Day. We would be lined up in front of them and we would sing the songs of our ethnic history accompanied with much sentiment. We would hear the old stories and be dressed in appropriate colors. We were reminded that the Gillicks of County Cavan in Ireland were royalty, actually kings! We learned who we were by what we heard and then lived. The only problem was that not one of our neighbors, nor the kids on the playground nor our teachers, treated any of us appropriately. Even our parents would occasionally forget. Irish royalty walking right down the streets of the south side of Milwaukee; we were the only ones who knew it. My siblings continue this tradition. If they don't celebrate their cultic and family histories, why they'd forget just how wonderful and blest they are.

Our forty days have begun. Our preparing to celebrate our identity has begun. We will listen to the stories, sing the songs, do the things which reveal to ourselves who we really are. We will receive again our name, our holiness. The real new life flows from the truth that we will do those things which reveal who we know ourselves to be. The people of Israel knew who God named them by their being baptized through the Exodus. They were to live in community doing the holy things of which offering the first fruits was a sign. We too have received our names through our being immersed in the baptismal waters of indicativity.

We are who God has claimed us to be and we are called to do those actions appropriate to that name

# WOW Word of the Day

Temptation  Get your food and strength from God and resist temptation .	Feb. 21
Attitude  Trust in God leads to blessings. Trust in humans alone leads to woe.	Feb. 14
Rise:  Get in, get out and raise men to faith	Feb. 7
Faith:  God performs miracles for those who have faith and love.	Jan. 31
Word made Flesh:  Jesus reads scripture in the temple that He is the Son of Man	Jan. 24
	Jan. 17
	Jan. 10
	Jan. 3