

1st Sunday in Lent + 8 March 2025 + Deut 26:4-10 + Rom 10:8-13 + Lk 4:1-13

As our 40-day long Lenten observance is meant to mirror, in a certain sense, Jesus' 40 day fast in the desert, it is fitting that we begin Lent with this Gospel. But to really understand today's Gospel, we must recall in the OT how the People of Israel were set free from their slavery in Egypt, are saved through the waters of the Red Sea, and begin the long journey home to the Promised Land. But that journey was not easy—they first had to cross through the desert of Sinai: a time of great testing, as well as a time of witnessing the power of God's presence. Sadly, the People failed the test by giving into idolatry and disobedience, and so wandered in the desert for 40 years. God always forgave them, but the People failed in their mission, which was to lead to all nations the know, worship, and serve the One True God.

Now this background is important to keep in mind as we consider the temptations of Jesus in the desert. After Jesus is anointed with the Holy Spirit in the waters of Baptism in the Jordan, He sets out, like His People Israel, into the desert. There, He too is tempted in His human nature. In essence, He is reliving the history of His People: fasting in the desert for 40 days just as the People wandered in the desert for 40 years. But this time there will be a much different result. Satan too is up to his old tricks. He tries to tempt Jesus in the same way that He caused God's People to fall. In fact, He has been peddling the same old lies ever since Adam and Eve. So what are His preferred lies? According to our Gospel, there are 3:

First, he attacks Jesus' identity: *If you are the Son of God, he says, command this stone to become bread.* Recall that in the story of Adam and Eve, Satan begins by attacking God's identity as their loving Father. When Eve says that eating the forbidden fruit will end in death, the serpent replies to her: *You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.* In other words, he is saying: *God is a liar, out to keep you from becoming the gods that you are!* Both Eve and Adam fall for this lie, and ever since, we have believed this lie too. We have such a hard time believing that our Heavenly Father really will take care of us, and so we think we must do everything on our own—basically be our own gods. And this self-reliance is our ruin.

And so perhaps because of this primordial lie, we want proof of the Father's goodness. We want God to prove Himself to us before we will believe in Him. Using the same old tired trick, Satan wants Jesus to prove His identity as God's beloved Son. After all, if He is the Son of God, shouldn't Jesus be able to make enough bread for everyone on earth to keep from going hungry? People make this protest all the time: *if there is a God, where is he in hunger, in pestilence, and in natural disasters?* Jesus' answer here is critically important: *It is written, He says, One does not live on bread alone.* This answer comes straight from Israel's history in the Book of Deuteronomy (8:3), where Moses tells the People just before entering the Promised Land: *Remember [the way] which the LORD your God has led you*

these forty years in the wilderness...testing you to know what was in your heart...and he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna...that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but...by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD. In other words, bread is important. But it is not the most important thing in life. What matters above all else is trusting in God, and submitting to His will. For those who do so will always have enough: God will never fail to give *Himself* to those who seek Him.

Having failed to break Jesus' trust in the Father, the devil tries to tempt Jesus with worldly power; that is, if Jesus is God's Son, then He needs to prove it through His political might. Throughout the ages, this lie has taken on many forms, and it is very tempting. After all, if Jesus is Lord, then why hasn't he established universal justice and peace? Wouldn't bowing down to satan have been easier and more effective than His suffering and death on the Cross? Well, no. *You shall worship the Lord, your God, Jesus says, and him alone shall you serve.* In other words, to worship rightly and to serve thankfully is to reign, is to be free. Now that's never been a very popular idea. But the reality is that authentic worship of God—worship that leads to right relationships, *is the only way to lasting peace and justice.*

So the devil tries one more time, sinking to a new low. He tries to use God's word against the Word of God! And again, he does bring up a good point. God has indeed promised through the Psalmist, *He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you.* So where *are* His angels when loved ones die of cancer, suffers with debilitating diseases, or are victims of unspeakable crimes? What is Jesus' defense? He replies: *You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.* It's the same answer, in essence, that God offers to Job when Job demands an answer for the terrible sufferings that fell on him. There are some things that our minds are too human to grasp without seeing the big picture that God sees.

Now that is not an easy, or completely satisfying answer, humanly speaking. But, we also know that God cannot lie. And Jesus will show us how to understand God's promise of His angels guarding us *in all our ways.* Yes, Jesus did suffer and even died on the Cross. But for God, human death is not the end. In the resurrection, God makes good on all of His promises. I know this takes a lot of faith to accept. But the Father's promise of eternal life to those who believe in Him is the only real certainty that we have in this life.

So, after all of this, we hear: *when the devil had finished every temptation, he departed from him for a time. For a **time!*** The devil would be back. In fact, satan is always whispering lies into the ears of anyone who is not vigilant and protected by the shield of truth which is the Word of God. Lent, then, is meant to wake us up to the reality of the spiritual battle that we engage in every day. And Jesus shows us how to win the victory: in fact, He has already won the victory for us on the Cross. We only have to hold on to Him in faith, for as St. Paul says in our 2nd reading today, *everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved!*