

**ECHOING GOD’S WORD  
IN  
THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY  
FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT  
March 9, 2025**

**SCRIPTURES:**

Deuteronomy 26:4-10	Our salvation is rooted in God’s actions in history.
Psalm 91:1-2,10-15	We can trust in God’s love.
Romans 10:8-13	Salvation comes to us from Christ’s resurrection
Luke 4:1-13	Jesus is ever faithful to the Father.

**READ THE SCRIPTURES:**

**Luke:**

Matthew and Luke relate a more simplified version of the Temptation in the Desert than the one found in Mark. The earliest Gospel (Mark 1:12-13) had simply stated that Jesus, immediately after his baptism by John, was driven into the desert by the Spirit, remaining there 40 days and tempted by Satan. Among wild beasts, he was cared for by angels. In the later two Gospels, we are given details of the Temptation and Jesus’ response to each so that we might have a model for our response when we are faced with temptation.

Luke is slightly different from Matthew. Luke arranges the temptations so that the one related to Jerusalem will be last, just as Jesus’ last great “temptation” (testing) will take place on the hill outside Jerusalem.

“Full of the Holy Spirit” occurs only here and in Acts for Stephen and Barnabas. Thus, Jesus becomes the model for the Christian and for the Church. The Spirit came upon Jesus at his baptism. The Holy Spirit fills the heart and mind of Christian disciples so that they can become what they were called to be. The Church, too, has to be filled with the Spirit so that it can fulfill its mission.

Jesus responds to the temptations by asserting and confessing his commitment to God and to God alone. Jesus defines his mission by rejecting false versions of what some thought the Messiah would be and would do. He can only be what his Father wants him to be, not what the world or the Evil One want him to be. He can only do the works of the heavenly Father. Defining his mission means that Jesus rejects what others want. He chooses only what the Father wants. His utter dependence on God lies at the heart of his identity as Lord and Messiah. There can be no other definition of him or of his ministry. At the very beginning of the public life, Jesus deliberately sets the parameters for the next three years. He turns away from the merely human aspirations for power, prestige, and riches, and attaches himself only to God!

The response of faith for us consists in confessing our dependence on the Lord. We, too, who are his disciples, must do what he did. We must choose what he chose. We must define ourselves the way he defined himself. We define ourselves by choosing to do God’s will rather than what our friends and neighbors sometimes suggest that we do. The values that the prevailing culture proclaim most often are at odds with what God intends for us. We need to choose every day between God’s will and the enticements of life in an affluent environment. Our “desert experience” comes to us clothed in comfort and in plenty. We have so much that we fail to see how really “poor” we are.

The Lord Jesus is our only resource and our only God. Everything else is really only “adversary.” (That is what the word “devil” means in the Bible.)

## **Deuteronomy:**

The “Second Law,” or the restatement of the Law of Moses for a people who are about to enter into the Land of Promise, comes to us in its present form from scribes who gathered, edited, and re-expressed the tradition of their ancestors for the reestablishment of the Jews after the Exile in Babylon. Attributed to Moses himself so that it would bear his prophetic authority, the book asks Israel to remember its heritage so that its faith may truly be alive. The history of God’s deeds on behalf of the people carries with it an experience of salvation for those who remember and proclaim God’s authorship of those deeds. In the telling of their sacred history, the people profess their faith in the Lord and recommit themselves to the Covenant. We tell the story of Jesus Christ, and the Covenant is renewed in us and for us.

## **Romans:**

Paul’s Letter to the Romans stands as the great testament of the Christian faith; it bears testimony to the power of God at work in Jesus Christ to bring salvation to all of humanity. Paul spells out the process of salvation: to believe in the heart and to profess with the lips that Jesus Christ is the Risen Lord. The point is that we must externalize what we believe internally; there has to be an external reality to faith that begins internally. “On the lips” cannot be restricted only to a verbal expression of faith; it needs to be lived out in our whole existence.

## **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

1. The Church faces a triple temptation today just as Jesus did in his earthly and human life. Describe the testing to which the Church is put in our American society. What kind of Church do most people in America want? A Church that proclaims the truth of the Gospel, which makes people uncomfortable? So, we are tempted to water down the truth. Give some examples.
2. Can you identify the “wild beasts” and the “angels” which respectively threaten and care for the family (group, parish, community) to which you belong? What are some of the threats to family life that surround us from every side? What forces operating today stand in the way of strong parish life? What are some of the blessings and protections that help families and parishes in our times?
3. Recite the deeds of God in your life as a profession of faith in the Lord. Are you aware that God is present with love even in hardship and misfortune? Share with others how God has been there for you in good times and in bad during your lifetime. Give concrete examples. Just telling the stories of our lives turns out to be a profession of faith because we proclaim how God was there for us all the time.

## PRAYER

**Lord our God,  
you formed men and women from the clay of the earth  
and breathed into them the spirit of life,  
but we turned from your face and sinned.**

**In this time of repentance  
we call out for your mercy.**

**Bring us back to you  
and to the life your Son won for us  
by his death on the cross.**

**(Adapted from the Sacramentary: 1st Sunday of Lent)**

## CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

Lent has acquired many layers of meaning over the centuries. Originally, it was meant as a period of intense spiritual preparation for the initiation of catechumens. The Church saw itself as especially needing to do battle with the power of evil which still tried to keep its hold on those called to baptism in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The whole Church stood in need of purification for its ministry of leading the catechumens to the bath of regeneration at the Easter Vigil. It, too, needed to be cleansed and forgiven as it called, exorcised, and washed the elect in the pool of new life in Christ.

With time, when there were no more adults to be initiated into the faith, the focus turned to the individual cleansing of the self through works of penance and mortification. Attention came to be given to the individual rather than to the community, each person trying to outperform the other in the severity of penitential practices. Prayer, fasting, and almsgiving for the forgiveness of personal sins replaced the community's ministry to those seeking reconciliation.

*The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* of Vatican II asks us to recover our most authentic heritage with respect to Lent: renewal of our baptism and seeking a new reconciliation with the Lord and with our neighbor. The "works" suggested for the period of Lent are listening to the word of God in sacred Scripture and praying and anticipating the celebration of the Easter mysteries. An updating of penitential practices is requested by the Second Vatican Council. The Church invites us to consider sin in its consequences on the society in which people live: sin as a true offense against God and neighbor. Practices of penance need to manifest the societal dimension of the Church and not just the repentance of the individual.

Even today, the Church searches for a renewal of meaning for its penitential practices. Several years ago, the chairman of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Pro-Life suggested that we restore the practice of abstaining from meat on Fridays throughout the year as a penitential practice to call attention to the sacredness of life in the unborn. His proposal was misunderstood by many Catholics and by the secular media. We really do not know how to interpret practices of penance, especially the personal and individual practices.

The baptismal font, now empty and dry, is draped in penitential colors and a generous supply of Ash Wednesday ashes available instead of holy water during Lent in some parish churches.

(See: *The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, #109-110)

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