

First Sunday of Lent – Year A Holy Season of Lent (St. Jude Parish)

“Victory Begins in the Desert: Trusting God in Times of Temptation”

Today we begin the holy season of Lent — forty days of grace, forty days of purification, forty days of returning to the Lord with all our hearts. The Church leads us into the desert. Not a desert of sand and heat, but a spiritual desert — a place of silence, testing, struggle, and encounter with God.

The Gospel of the First Sunday of Lent in Year A presents Jesus in the wilderness, tempted by the devil (Matthew 4:1–11). Before He begins His public ministry, before the miracles and preaching, before the Cross and Resurrection — He enters the desert. And there, He faces temptation.

Lent is our desert. It is not a punishment. It is preparation. It is not about deprivation. It is about transformation.

The Gospel tells us that Jesus was “led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil.” Notice this carefully: He was led by the Spirit. Sometimes we think that when we face struggles or temptations, God has abandoned us. But this Gospel reminds us that even in moments of testing, God is present. The desert is not a place of God’s absence; it is often the place of God’s deepest work in our hearts.

After fasting for forty days and forty nights, Jesus was hungry. The devil approaches Him at His weakest moment. Temptation often comes when we are tired, discouraged, lonely, or hungry — physically or spiritually. The devil says, “If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.”

This is the first temptation: to satisfy immediate needs in the wrong way. Bread is not bad. Hunger is real. But the temptation is to put material needs above spiritual truth. Jesus responds, “One does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

How powerful this is for us today! We live in a culture obsessed with comfort, consumption, and instant satisfaction. We are surrounded by advertisements telling us that happiness comes from what we buy, eat, wear, or possess. But Jesus reminds us: we are more than bodies. We have souls. And the soul starves when it is not nourished by God’s Word.

During Lent, we fast not because food is evil, but because we must learn that God is our true sustenance. When we fast, we discover our attachments. When we pray, we rediscover our dependence on God.

The second temptation takes Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple. The devil tells Him to throw Himself down so angels will catch Him. This is the temptation of pride and spiritual manipulation — to test God, to demand proof, to use religion for self-glory.

How often do we do this? “God, if You love me, prove it.” “If You answer this prayer, then I will believe.” We want signs, dramatic miracles, instant results. But faith is not a performance. Faith is trust.

Jesus answers, “You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.”

Lent teaches us humble trust. It teaches us to love God not because He performs for us, but because He is God. True faith says, "Even if I do not understand, even if I suffer, I trust You."

The third temptation is perhaps the most dangerous. The devil shows Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and says, "All these I shall give to you, if you will prostrate yourself and worship me."

Here is the temptation of power, control, and compromise. The devil offers glory without the Cross. Authority without suffering. Success without obedience.

Is this not the great temptation of our world? To achieve success at any cost. To compromise values for advantage. To sacrifice integrity for recognition. To worship success instead of God.

Jesus responds firmly: "The Lord, your God, shall you worship and Him alone shall you serve."

Lent forces us to examine: Who or what do we truly worship? Is it God? Or is it money, reputation, comfort, influence, pleasure, or self?

Every sin is, in some way, misplaced worship. We give our hearts to something less than God.

My dear brothers and sisters, the desert reveals what is inside us. When distractions are removed, when comforts are reduced, when noise is silenced — we see ourselves clearly. And sometimes what we see is not pleasant: impatience, anger, pride, jealousy, addiction, selfishness.

But do not be afraid of what the desert reveals. The purpose of Lent is not to shame us. It is to heal us. Jesus entered the desert not only to defeat Satan for Himself — but to defeat Satan for us. He shows us that temptation can be resisted. He shows us that the Word of God is our weapon.

Each time Jesus was tempted, He responded with Scripture. He did not argue emotionally. He did not negotiate. He stood on the Word of God. This teaches us something very important: if we do not know God's Word, we are spiritually defenseless.

Therefore, during this Lent:

- Do not only give up sweets or coffee — take up Scripture.
- Do not only fast from food — fast from gossip, negativity, and criticism.
- Do not only abstain from meat — abstain from resentment and unforgiveness.
- Add daily prayer.
- Add confession.
- Add acts of charity.
- Add reconciliation in your family.
- Add silence in your life.

The desert is not meant to break us — it is meant to strengthen us.

At the end of the Gospel, after Jesus resists the temptations, the devil leaves Him, and angels come and minister to Him. This is a promise for us. Temptation does not last forever. If we remain faithful, God sends His grace, His peace, His consolation.

Lent is not about forty days of sadness. It is forty days of spiritual training. It is the gymnasium of the soul. And at the end of it stands Easter — victory, resurrection, new life.

But Easter joy comes only after desert faithfulness.

So today, as we begin this sacred season, let us not enter Lent casually. Let us enter intentionally. Let us walk with Jesus into the desert — not to be defeated, but to be purified.

Because the same Jesus who overcame temptation in the wilderness lives within us.

Question for Meditation

As I begin this Lent, what is the strongest temptation in my life — and am I truly willing to enter the desert with Jesus so that He can transform it into victory? **