



He Speaks: Finding Christ in the Days of Lent

First Sunday of Lent

Readings: Genesis 2:7-9; 3:1-7, Psalm 51:3-4, 5-6, 12-13, 17, Romans 5:12-19 or 5:12, 17-19, Matthew 4:1-11

"It is written"

Each Lent we hear the story of Jesus' forty days in the desert, his fasting, his temptation by the devil, and his subsequent victory over the tempter. It's a scene we have perhaps imagined, or even seen treated in movies or on television. We might think about Jesus' human nature – his hunger. We might consider his divine nature – the tempter acknowledges it when he calls him the Son of God. But we already know the end of this story. Jesus wins. The devil left him. And Jesus was ministered to by angels. It's easy to hear this and assume there isn't much here for us beyond admiration.

But then we could just pause on these few words of Jesus: It is written.

The devil was hitting Jesus with temptations hand-picked for him. He had just been baptized in the Jordan, and had the voice from heaven say, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." So it would make sense for the tempter to try to make Jesus question the Father's love for him, especially after forty days alone and hungry. Can't your Father even take care of your physical needs? Does the Father really love you enough to save you? Has the Father given you all you really desire? For each of these temptations, Jesus said, "It is written."

Now wait, you say, Jesus was "the Word made flesh." He is the author of it all, so of course, under duress, he would be able to call to mind those specific Scriptures that would put the devil in his place. But I'm not Jesus.

No, we're not Jesus. But we can imitate him, and he called us to! Temptations come to us when we are weak or feeling exposed, just like Jesus was. Tired and spent after a long day, we might be tempted to snap at our spouse or children. Hearing a juicy piece of gossip, we might be tempted to whisper it to someone else. Under pressure at work, we might be tempted to take credit for something we didn't do. You know what your own temptations are; they're unique to each of us, as Jesus' were to him. But we have what we need to put it down. "It is written."

You don't have to be a Scripture scholar or a theologian to do this. You have all you need. Here are just a few promises we can lean on when we're tempted or discouraged—words that remind us who God is and who we are to him:

I will never forsake you or abandon you. (Heb 13:5)
My grace is sufficient for you. (2 Cor 12:9)
Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. (John 14:27)

Sometimes even these short verses might be hard to call to mind, especially if you're bearing up under a heavy load. And that's okay. You can just whisper, "It is written:" God will never leave me. God's grace is enough. Jesus gives me peace.

Lent is not about proving our strength, but about learning where we turn when we are weak. Jesus shows us that the words of Scripture are not distant or theoretical—they are meant to be lived, trusted, and leaned on. When temptation comes, we don't face it alone. We respond as children who know their Father's voice.

Consider

Temptations come. It's our response to them that sets us on a path to a deeper relationship with Christ. Rather than trying to rely on willpower alone, Lent invites us to practice turning to God. What is one word, phrase, or line—from Scripture, the Mass, or a saint—that you could keep close and return to when temptation comes?

Whisper Prayer

Jesus, be with me.

Listening with the Church — First Sunday of Lent

A Response to the Devil

In his Angelus for the First Sunday of Lent, 2019, Pope Francis discussed the three temptations Jesus endured at the hand of the devil, "greed for possession..., human vainglory, and the exploitation of God." Each of these, he said, is a path that "will lead us to ruin." The Holy Father said that Jesus showed us in concrete terms how to respond to the tempter: "Jesus does not enter a discussion, but responds to the three challenges with only the Word of God. This shows us that one does not dialogue with the devil; one must not discuss, one only responds to him with the Word of God." In practice, this might look like rejecting the little compromises or "work-arounds" that try to justify what we know isn't right. Lent is an ideal time to notice when we are tempted to start "dialoguing" with the tempter instead of answering with God's Word.