

1st Sunday

OF LENT • CYCLE C

OPENING PRAYER

Loving God, as we enter our Lenten journey, we desire to focus on your presence in our lives and come to know ourselves better at this time. Help us acknowledge the ways we might be distracted in life and fail to grow in a love relationship with you, our ultimate happiness. We ask this through Jesus Christ, in union with the Holy Spirit, who lives and reigns forever. Amen.

Readings

Deuteronomy 26: 4-10

Psalms 91: 1-2, 10-15

Romans 10: 8-13

Luke 4: 1-13

COMMENTARY ON THE WORD OF GOD

The readings for this First Sunday of Lent begin with an appreciation of God's active goodness in the lives of the Israelites as they express gratitude in communion with the larger community. The Psalm speaks of the importance of trust in God and God's resulting assurance of protection. The Gospel of Luke demonstrates for us the necessity of knowing who we are and who we are called to be, accepting our humanity as we struggle with evil. In Romans, Paul recognizes salvation through the resurrection which is to be appropriated in our lives through faith and transformation, and is available to all people.

GRATITUDE FOR GOD'S GOODNESS

In the reading from Deuteronomy, an Israelite is reminded to offer the first fruits of his harvest to God. His personal gratitude is blended with the appreciation of the whole of Israel in a profession of faith which reveals their story of salvation.

He recalls that his ancestor was a "wandering Aramean," a nomadic refugee who went down to Egypt. There his descendants became a large nation who cried to God and were delivered from Egyptian bondage. God gave them possession of the land God promised. Remembering God's goodness and gifts to them, each landowner, along with his foreign workers and with the priest who is serving at the sanctuary, responds by offering the produce of his land. The personal gift is blended with community worship. The focus is only on God's active goodness. This blending of personal faith with the larger community is central to the Covenant of promise and commitment.

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We too must be aware of God's active presence in all things, acknowledging God as the center of our lives, dependent on God for our existence and sustenance. As God heard the cry of the Israelites and delivered and protected them from Egyptian bondage, so God is constantly protecting us from the bondage of our enemy, our own self-centeredness. Only with God's grace can we transcend our selfishness. God's grace helps us to be aware of God's ever abiding presence. This grace enables us to become our true self and express gratitude for God's goodness and gifts.

Today's psalm, one of trust in God's presence and protection, encourages us to continue trusting God. Where there is authentic dependence on God, salvation is guaranteed.

TRANSFORMATION THROUGH FAITH

Because some of the Jews continued to depend on the law and their own righteousness, Paul says our salvation is close within our reach; it is deep within us. Faith in Jesus as our risen Lord is necessary. This faith is a deep commitment and adherence to the risen Jesus, meaning that as a result of trusting in Jesus' resurrection, our lives will change and be transformed. This faith involves our whole way of life and values. Therefore, expressing faith in Jesus involves accepting the pain, difficulty, and suffering that result from our transformation.

FINDING OUR TRUE SELF

In Luke 3, the chapter previous to today's Gospel, Luke points to Jesus as divine. In today's Gospel, Luke shows Jesus to be fully human. Jesus' mission, therefore, unfolds within human history, where he struggles with evil in the desert, just as the Israelites did in the desert during the Exodus.

Jesus is led into the desert accompanied by the Holy Spirit for 40 days, where in prayerful communion with the Father, he confronts the power of the devil. The temptations he experiences clarify who he will be as the Savior. Will he cater to his human desires, or will he be faithful to what God desires?

In the first temptation, Luke portrays Jesus as fully human, not rejecting his humanity. His mission will be within the limitations of the human condition. In the second temptation, Luke portrays Jesus as rejecting the view that his mission is about human power and law. His mission is from God, and an act of worship through which he will make a total gift of himself to God through his passion and death. In the third temptation at the temple in Jerusalem, demonstrating that his entire ministry is a journey to Jerusalem and to his death, Jesus rejects the view that being the Son of God will bring about "the extraordinary", the view that God will save him from death.

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Even though Jesus experienced temptation in his public ministry, he was perfected through it, and completed his mission. At Jesus' passion (23:35-39), he once again was tempted, but responded by accepting the cross and dying as a man of peace and strength, and thus, achieving victory over sin.

Jesus' response to these three temptations shows us how we are to respond to our own temptations. Luke spoke to the Christians of his time who struggled with their temptations: not accepting their human condition, not trusting God, trying to be in control, and thereby limiting God's freedom. We too must accept our human condition and trust God to bring us to complete fulfillment and happiness.

Just as Jesus became aware of who he was and what his mission was, we must become aware of who we are and what our mission is. The frustrations and expectations of our daily lives often cause us to lose touch with our "true self," the human person God has created us to be. We have a tendency to act out of our "false self" not accepting our human condition and limitations, and trying to be in control, rather than trusting God. We often become obsessed with who we are not. Sometimes we can be unaware of the addictions or habits we develop to compensate for our limitations or emptiness. There are habits or addictions which can alienate us from our true selves such as the desire to be in control, apathy, pleasure, taking drugs, overeating, excessive use of the media, gaining approval, being popular.

Today's Gospel encourages us to become aware of our human limitations and live in God's presence. When we trust our good and gracious God to help us bear the hardships of life, our selfish habits for happiness will be dismantled. Only then will we find our "true self" that God created us to be.

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SAINT OF THE WEEK

SAINT ROSE PHILIPPINE DUCHESNE
1769-1852 • Canonized in 1988

St. Rose Philippine Duchesne was born in Grenoble, France in 1769. She entered the Society of the Sacred Heart, where she cared for the sick and poor, helped fugitive priests, visited prisons, and taught children during the French Revolution.

In 1818 at the age of 49, Mother Duchesne was sent from France with four other sisters and came to America where she met the

challenges of early American frontier conditions with outstanding courage. She set up schools and orphanages for the children of pioneers. She opened the first free school west of the Missouri River.

At the age of 71, she was able to fulfill her dream of founding a school for Native Americans. After a faith-filled life, she died in 1852 and was canonized by Pope John Paul II in 1988.

MEMORY VERSE

"The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart."
ROMANS 10:8B

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

Discuss the following questions.

1. Which of the temptations of Jesus is my biggest or most common temptation: the desire for pleasure (bread), for power and prestige (fame), or asking God to rescue me when I have made a poor choice? Why is that my biggest temptation?
2. When I reflect on my actions, do I think about how I broke a law or how my action may affect or weaken my relationship with God? Is my spiritual life about laws or relationship? Share.
3. When have I acted out of my "false self" i.e., not accepting my human condition and limitations, but trying to be in control, rather than trusting God? What was the result?
4. When have I been my true self (in touch with the person God calls me to be)? What did I experience?
5. How do I show my gratitude for God's goodness?

LIVING AS DISCIPLES

Select one or more of the following actions, or one of your own choosing, to do this week. Be prepared to share with your group how this experience affected your faith journey.

1. In the evening, reflect on your awareness of God's presence during that day. Talk to God about this.
2. Take time to reflect on the gifts that God has given you and how you have used one or more of these gifts in love toward others.
3. Reflect on how you acted out of your "false self". Ask God to help you to become your "true self".
4. Pray for the persons from your parish or diocese who are becoming Catholics at Easter and who will participate in the "Rite of Election" at the Cathedral the first Sunday of Lent.
5. When you sign your forehead, lips, and heart before hearing the Gospel read at Mass, be aware of asking God to be in your mind, on your lips, and in your heart.
6. We are called during Lent to prayer, alms giving, and fasting. Choose one of these to do this week.

CLOSING PRAYER AND RITUAL

Gather around a prayer table with a crucifix, a Bible, a candle, a bowl of water, and a desert scene.

Begin the prayer by inviting participants to dip their fingers in the bowl of water and sign themselves with the sign of the cross to recall their baptismal commitment.

All: Father, we desire to grow closer to you and experience your love and mercy. We believe your forgiveness is unlimited. We desire to become aware of our blindness and our faults, express sincere sorrow to you, and change our lives with your grace. We have confidence that you will respond with love and care and welcome us back.

Reader 1: My God, my refuge and my fortress, in you I trust.

Reader 2: No evil will befall us, nor shall affliction come near our tent.

Reader 3: To your angels you have given command, that they guard us in all our ways.

Reader 4: Help us to tread upon the asps and the vipers and trample down the lions and the dragons of our lives.

Sing "Hosea" by Weston Priory or a similar Lenten hymn.

Share a sign of peace.