

# 1st Sunday of Lent • Cycle A

## OPENING PRAYER

### Readings

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

God of mercy and compassion, look kindly upon us as we begin our Lenten journey. Following the example of your beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who endured temptation for our sake but did not sin, may we also, when tempted, be unwavering in our faith and firm in our trust that you alone have the power to save us. Amen.

## COMMENTARY ON THE WORD OF GOD

On this the First Sunday of Lent, the Church, in her wisdom, presents us with the entire plan of Salvation History—from Creation to the salvific action of Jesus’s passion and death. In the Book of Genesis, we read how Adam and Eve, wanting to be like God, disobeyed, thereby losing their innocence and plunging all of humankind into a state of brokenness and sin. In his saving plan, God sends his own Son, who not only reverses the effects of original sin, but shares with humanity his Divine Sonship, calling all into relationship with his Father as adopted sons and daughters. Jesus is the new Adam who, instead of succumbing to the devil’s temptation, remains faithful to his identity and mission.

## TEMPTATIONS OF THE INCARNATE GOD, JESUS

It is hard for us, and sometimes even a little shocking, to think that Jesus suffered temptation. Is this because we feel that temptations, even when we don’t give in to them, leave us feeling somewhat sullied or shamed? How could Jesus have been tempted? We feel that in some way temptation denotes imperfection, yet we know that Jesus was infinitely holy and good!

Pope Benedict XVI, in his brilliant reflection on the temptations of Jesus in Chapter Two of his book *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, reminds us that Jesus’s solidarity with humankind included “exposure to the risks and perils of human existence” (26). In the “Letter to the Hebrews”, we read, “Therefore he had to be made like his brethren in every respect... For because he himself has suffered and been tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted” (Hebrews 2:17-18),

and “For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin” (4:15).

It will be helpful for us to understand as well that the temptations of Jesus, after his 40-day fast in the desert, as related in today’s Gospel, were not a one-time event. Many times, throughout his public ministry, Jesus experienced an inner struggle to be faithful to his true mission and identity as the Messiah and Savior of the human race. The very people who heard his words misunderstood the true nature of the Kingdom, clamoring for Jesus to be their king in a worldly sense.

In all these inner conflicts and struggles, our Blessed Savior never wavered in his faithfulness to his Father. “The temptation in the desert shows Jesus, the humble Messiah, who triumphs over Satan by his total adherence to the plan of salvation willed by the Father” (Catechism of the Catholic Church 566).

Let us, then, take a closer look at the three temptations of Jesus in the desert in order to understand exactly of what they consisted. “What must the Savior of the world do or not do? That is the question the temptations of Jesus are about” (Benedict 29).

The first temptation: “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread” (Matthew 4:3). After his long fast, Jesus was hungry. The temptation was not only to relieve his own hunger—for he had the divine power to do so instantly—but also to relieve the hunger of the world. After all, this was something the people would want of him, expect of their Messiah. And he would miraculously feed the five thousand... but his mission was not to provide mainly for the material needs of humankind. The loaves and fishes were a sign pointing to himself as the Bread of Life. Quoting Scripture, Jesus repels the Tempter with these words: “Not by bread alone, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God” (Deuteronomy 8:3).

In the second temptation, the devil takes Jesus to the pinnacle of the Temple and challenges him to throw himself down. The devil quotes Scripture in order to lure Jesus into his trap: “For to his angels he has given command about you, that they guard you in all your ways. Upon their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone” (Psalm 91:11-12). Jesus resists the devil’s temptation by also quoting Scripture: “Again it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test’” (Matthew 4:7). It is not for us to arrogantly place our demands on God, but to trust with a humble spirit that he will protect and defend us if we are faithful to him—as Jesus was. “[Jesus did not] leap into the abyss. He did not tempt God. But he did descend into the abyss of death, into the night of abandonment, and into the desolation of the defenseless” (Benedict 38).

The third temptation has to do with human power and glory. The devil shows Jesus all the kingdoms of the world in their magnificence and promises that all these will belong to Jesus if he will but worship him. For Jesus, this deception is the last straw. He counters with “Get away, Satan! It is written, ‘The Lord, your God, shall you worship and him alone shall you serve’” (Matthew 4:10). Jesus understands his true mission and is faithful to it. He does indeed promise a kingdom to his faithful ones, but his kingdom will only come about through his role as the lowly suffering servant.

The people of Jesus’s time did not understand who he was, or what his true mission was. Do we truly understand even now? We conclude with this thought-provoking question-and-answer of Pope Benedict’s: “What did Jesus actually bring, if not world peace, universal prosperity and a better world? What has he brought? The answer is very simple: God.... He has brought God, and now we know his face, now we can call upon him. Now we know the path that we human beings have to take in this world” (Benedict 44).

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## SAINT OF THE WEEK

### SAINT NAZARIA IGNACIA MARCH MESA *1889-1943 • Canonized in 2018*

Our Saint of the Week, Saint Nazaria Mesa, was born on January 10, 1889 in Madrid, the fourth of ten children. In 1898 she heard the voice of Jesus Christ call out to her in which he said to her – “You: Nazaria – follow Me.” Her parents were not pleased with her desire to enter the religious life and forbade it. While she was in school, she stayed with her grandmother who granted her permission to join the Third Order of Saint Francis; afterwards, her parents began to relax their religious restrictions on their daughter.

Due to harsh economic conditions, the family immigrated to Mexico in 1904. She joined the Little Sisters of the Abandoned Elderly. She was sent to Bolivia to work before being sent to do her novitiate back in Spain and received the religious name of “Nazaria of Saint Teresa of Jesus”. After her profession, she returned to Bolivia.

She left the order in 1925 to found a new religious order, Missionaries of the Crusade, and was soon elected as the Superior General. She later embarked on a pilgrimage to Rome where she met Pope Pius XI in a private audience. She told the pope that she wanted to die for the church but Pius XI told her: “Do not die but live and work for

the church.” She then worked in Buenos Aires in Argentina until her death in 1943. Saint Nazaria was canonized in October 2018.

## MEMORY VERSE

*“One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”*

MATTHEW 4:4

## FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

*Discuss the following questions.*

1. Jesus shared our human condition, including the experience of being tempted. He resisted the tempter by quoting Scripture. How do I resist temptation in order to be faithful to God?
2. Satan attacks us more often with half-truths than with total lies. When have I realized that the evil spirit was trying to deceive me with a half-truth? How did I respond?
3. How am I tempted by pleasure, power, or fame?
4. When do I turn to Scripture as a support for my spiritual life?
5. Am I ready for Lent? What am I planning to do this Lent to enable me to face temptations and testing that may take me away from Jesus?

## 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. Participate in your parish’s Lenten food drive or community food bank by donating food for the poor. Prayerfully reflect on the passage, “I was hungry and you gave me to eat” (Matt. 25:35).
2. Do something good for someone in secret. Reflect on Matthew 6:1-4.
3. Before going to bed, using the examen of consciousness, ask yourself how you were tempted today by pleasure, power, or fame. Ask Jesus to help you resist temptation.

4. In a spirit of gratitude, make the Stations of the Cross, reflecting on how much Jesus suffered to gain eternal life for us.
5. With a group of friends or parishioners, view the film: *The Sultan and the Saint* about St. Francis of Assisi. Discuss with the group in what ways St. Francis was like Jesus.
6. In the *Exsultet*, proclaimed at the beginning of the Easter Vigil Service, the sin of Adam is referred to as a “happy fault.” Reflect and pray over how the original sin of Adam can be regarded as a “happy fault.”
7. Attend the Rite of Election this Sunday or pray for the catechumens in your parish who will become the “Elect” at the Rite of Election.

## CLOSING PRAYER AND RITUAL

*Gather around a table with a crucifix, a Bible, and a lighted candle.  
Sing the first verse of the hymn: “The Glory of These Forty Days”*

The glory of these forty days  
We celebrate with songs of praise;  
For Christ, by Whom all things were made,  
Himself has fasted and has prayed.

**Leader:** Let us pray to our heavenly Father who protects us from all evil and defends us against all temptation by the power of his Word.

**Response:** Deliver us, Lord Jesus!  
From every temptation to mistrust: (Response)  
From every temptation to replace God with material satisfaction: (Response)  
From every temptation to power and privilege: (Response)  
From every temptation to think ourselves better than others: (Response)  
From every temptation to doubt God’s forgiveness: (Response)  
From every temptation to.....(Allow for spontaneous prayers.) (Response)

### **Closing Prayer:**

Heavenly Father, grant us this Lent the grace to put our trust totally in you, rather than in ourselves, when confronted with the many temptations that distract us from you. Purify our hearts of all unworthy desires that we may look forward with joy to the glory of Easter. We ask this through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

*Sing the last verse of the hymn: “The Glory of These Forty Days”*

O Father, Son, and Spirit blest,  
To thee be every prayer addressed,  
Who art in threefold Name adored,  
From age to age, the only Lord.

