



Bringing Home the Word

First Sunday of Lent (C)
March 6, 2022

Learning from Jesus' Temptations

By Fr. Mark Haydu

Every Lent, priests, nuns, monks, and many laypeople pray the following: “Be sober and vigilant. Your opponent the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion looking for [someone] to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). Jesus encountered this truth in his temptations in the desert, another place in his ministry where he experienced the struggle of humanity.

The temptations begin, “If you are the Son of God...” All our temptations begin by doubting and challenging

Jesus to prove himself. Although Jesus is all-powerful and all-good, we struggle to make sense of suffering and tragedies.

The temptations continue as Jesus is invited to satisfy himself, impress others, and skip suffering. But Jesus responds repeatedly in humility. In the desert he doesn't turn stones into bread. He later does something far greater; he turns bread and wine into himself. When tempted, we cry out to him to soften the hard realities of our lives. And Jesus does just that. He suffers in his passion, dies, and rises again to become life-giving bread for us. He becomes manna in our desert.

When we wish for power, Jesus promises we will reign with him if we also let him suffer for us and we with him. The devil would have us take matters into our own hands, doubt God, and make him prove himself by our measures. Yet if we listen to Jesus, look at his answers, and learn from his life, then true power will be ours. +

Sunday Readings

Deuteronomy 26:4-10

Then the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a strong hand and outstretched arm, with terrifying power, with signs and wonders.

Romans 10:8-13

There is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all, enriching all who call upon him.

Luke 4:1-13

When the devil had finished every temptation, he departed from him for a time.

All our temptations begin by doubting and challenging Jesus to prove himself.

A Word from Pope Francis

Fasting makes us share the situation of many people who face the torment of hunger and makes us more attentive to others; almsgiving is a blessed opportunity to collaborate with God's providence for the benefit of his children.

—Address to Pro Petri Sede Association, February 16, 2018



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What makes me question God the most?
- How can God's word and Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection respond to that doubt?

Signed, Sealed, Delivered

By Fr. Byron Miller, CSsR

An illustrated *Catholic Guide to Ashes* by Bill Donaghy comically identifies the different shapes and sizes of the dark smudge we receive on our foreheads at the beginning of Lent. Examples include a neatly formed ashen cross as “First in Line,” an amorphous spot as “The Blob,” and an oversized, heavily stroked cross as “Father’s Revenge.”

While ministering in New Orleans, I observed people on Ash Wednesday bearing on their foreheads what may be mistaken for a flattened palmetto bug. However, I wouldn’t attribute this splotch to “Father’s Revenge” but to the aftermath of “Father’s Revelry” on Mardi Gras the day before! (I speak indulgently from experience.)

In 1949, British author Evelyn Waugh had his own observations about New Orleans: “Ash Wednesday: warm rain falling in streets unsightly with the dragged survivals of carnival. The Roosevelt Hotel overflowing with crapulous tourists planning their return journeys....But across the way the Jesuit Church was teeming with life all day long; a continuous, dense crowd of all colors and conditions moving up to the altar rails and returning with their foreheads signed with ash....All that day, all over the lighthearted city, one encountered the little black smudge on the forehead which sealed us members of a great brotherhood who can both rejoice and recognize the limits of rejoicing” (*Life* magazine).



Lent is the penitential season to rejoice within limits: “For you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:19). We recognize our short lifespans and limitations, but we rejoice assuredly that the dust to which we shall one day return is glorified in Christ without limit! “The cross, with which the ashes are traced upon us, is the sign of Christ’s victory over death....It might be good stoicism to receive a mere reminder of our condemnation to die, but it is not Christianity” (from *Ash Wednesday: Spiritual Medicine* by Thomas Merton).

Thus, ashes are both a sign of mortality and purification in Christ. Before the charred remnants of last year’s palms take fuzzy form on our foreheads, the holy chrism oil first

marked the spot at our baptism! “The person baptized is configured to Christ. Baptism seals the Christian with the indelible spiritual mark...of his belonging to Christ” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1272). Moreover, “The faithful Christian who has ‘kept this seal’ until the end, remaining faithful to the demands of his Baptism, will be able to depart this life ‘marked with the sign of faith’...in expectation of the blessed vision of God...and in the hope of the resurrection” (CCC 1274).

So, if the cross is a little disfigured on our foreheads on Ash Wednesday, let its distortion represent a desire to reconfigure ourselves to Christ in Lent. Now’s the time to give alms, do penance, and amend our lives! +

We recognize our short lifespans and limitations, but we rejoice assuredly that the dust to which we shall one day return is glorified in Christ without limit!

PRAYER

Lord, give me the courage to accept the painful, ugly realities of life and become your advocate of truth and justice in the world.

—From *Mindful Meditations for Every Day of Lent and Easter*, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

March 7–12

Monday, Lenten Weekday:
Lv 19:1–2, 11–18 / Mt 25:31–46

Tuesday, Lenten Weekday:
Is 55:10–11 / Mt 6:7–15

Wednesday, Lenten Weekday:
Jon 3:1–10 / Lk 11:29–32

Thursday, Lenten Weekday:
Est C:12, 14–16, 23–25 / Mt 7:7–12

Friday, Lenten Weekday:
Ez 18:21–28 / Mt 5:20–26

Saturday, Lenten Weekday:
Dt 26:16–19 / Mt 5:43–48

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