

1st Sunday of Lent CYCLE C

Readings

Deuteronomy 26:4-10
Psalm 91:1-2, 10-15
Romans 10:8-13
Luke 4:1-13

Opening Prayer

Gracious God, as we begin this forty-day journey through Lent, help us to rely on your word, your grace, and your love to support and guide us. We want to deepen our relationship with you, and to know and do your will more perfectly in our daily lives. Amen.

Commentary on the Word of God

Salvation, deliverance, gratitude, and God's faithfulness are common themes in the readings for this first Sunday of Lent. "We cried to the Lord our God...and he heard our cry and saw our afflictions..." (Deuteronomy 26:7). The Psalmist tells us, "Whoever clings to me I will deliver" (Psalm 91:14a). "For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Romans 10:13). Jesus' temptation in the desert demonstrates that he who relies on God will be delivered from the power of the devil.

Gratitude for freedom and the land

The reading from Deuteronomy deals with the annual tithe of agricultural products made by the grateful Israelite. Verse three acknowledges that it is because of God that Israel enjoys the land. Israel also chose to remember the Exodus, a prior act of God on its behalf that was perhaps even more important to them than the gift of the land. It was through the Exodus event that Israel was transformed from a nation of slaves into a people set free. These rites expressed their gratitude for freedom and the land.

After setting their offering before the Lord, the worshippers acknowledge their origins as a people without land or freedom. Referring to Israel not by name, but as "a wandering Aramean" (Deuteronomy 26:5a) underlines the contrast between the miserable circumstances of Israel earlier and the settlement in the Promised Land. This passage also admits that Israel was an alien in a foreign land, Egypt. This remembrance of their alien status prompted the Israelites to treat the alien or foreigner with kindness. We might ask ourselves, how do I regard the alien in our land? Were my ancestors, like the Israelites of old, from a foreign country? How thankful am I to God for the gift of living in a free country?

After presenting their tithes to God, a festal meal of thanksgiving followed. We

Christians, too, gather weekly to celebrate the bountiful gifts we have received from our gracious God with a eucharistic (thanksgiving) ritual meal.

God protects his faithful ones

Psalm 91 was chosen for this Sunday's responsorial psalm because the devil in the Lucan Gospel account of the temptation of Jesus quoted Psalm 91:11-12. This, of course, illustrates how the Scriptures can be misused. This song of trust comes from a person who has experienced the asylum of the temple. The "shadow of the almighty," literally, the "shadow of the wings of the almighty," is a figurative reference to God's motherly protection of the faithful (cf. Psalms 17:8; 36:8; 57:2). Some deities in the ancient East were pictured as winged. Verses 14-16 speak directly to all who maintain their trust in the face of the danger and bitterness of life. Does this mean that believers will never suffer?

Jesus is Lord

Just as in the first reading we heard the ancient creed of Israel, in this second reading we hear the confession of faith of the believers of Christ. "The word is near you in your mouth and in your heart" (Romans 10:8) is a quote from Deuteronomy 30:14. Paul emphasizes in this passage that it is important to recognize and declare Jesus as Lord, a phrase very likely borrowed from early church worship and the creedal formula of the early Palestinian church. What is demanded is an inward faith: "believe in your heart," (10:9) that will guide the whole person. It also includes an assent to an expression of faith. To confess Jesus as Lord was frequently quite hazardous in the first century. For a Jew at that time, it could mean disruption of normal family and other social relationships, including great economic sacrifice. Are there any consequences for us today in declaring "Jesus is Lord"?

"For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all, enriching all who call upon him" (10:12). All have the same opportunity, both Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews), to share alike in the new uprightness through faith. In the Old Testament those who "call upon the name of the Lord" indicated sincere and pious Israelites. In the New Testament it is transferred to Christians. *The Jerome Biblical Commentary* states that verses 12-13 are an eloquent witness to the early church's worship of Christ as *Kyrios*, which means Lord or Master.

No shortcuts to sanctity

In the first two readings, we heard the ancient creed of Israel and the creed of the early Palestinian Christian Church. In the Gospel reading, we hear of Jesus' temptation in the desert. It was the place where the people of Israel and John the Baptist had been formed. It was also a place where demons dwelled and where the people of Israel in the Old Testament failed the test. Jesus, however, would pass the test by overcoming the power of evil. The three temptations of Jesus are the same three temptations that were Israel's downfall during their desert experience – complaining about the manna, worshipping the golden calf, and testing God. These

were temptations that Jesus would face throughout his life, and that his followers, too, would undergo. Jesus' first temptation was to divert the power he had received from God to fulfill his mission to that of fulfilling his own needs. Second, the devil suggested a shortcut for Jesus to rule over all nations by encouraging him to give first place to someone or something other than God. And lastly, the devil asks Jesus to gain the support he needs from the people by a spectacular miracle.

"Jesus ate nothing..." (Luke 4:2) is symbolic of Jesus' fullness of the Spirit and his helplessness before an omnipotent God who generously gives and sustains life. Jesus, being human, was weakened by this fast. It was when Jesus was most weak that the devil, who is quite clever, attacked him. The devil knew that a holy person would not be tempted to do something wicked; therefore, Satan tried to induce Jesus to respond to the call of God in a way that is not God's way. Jesus refused to be fooled. Jesus refutes each temptation by quoting from Scripture.

Like Jesus, all of us are called to rely on God who supplies us with all we need. With prayer and discernment, we, too, can foil the clever attempts by Satan to induce us to respond to God in inappropriate ways. There are no shortcuts to sanctity. "You shall worship the Lord your God, and God only shall you serve" (4:8b). This rallying cry moves us to take up our cross daily to serve and worship our God only, and no one, nor anything else. That is the way of ultimate deliverance and salvation.

Jesus' responses to the devil's temptations teach us how we, too, can respond to temptation. As we begin our journey through Lent, this Sunday's Gospel calls us to adopt the same confidence that Jesus had when he was faced with temptation. God's word alone suffices; God's promise of protection is trustworthy; God alone is God!

*Sister Digna Vela, IWBS
Incarnate Word Convent, Victoria, TX*

Year of Faith

Porta Fidei "Door of Faith"

Apostolic Letter of Pope Benedict XVI for the Year of Faith

9. We want this Year to arouse in every believer the aspiration to **profess** the faith in fullness and with renewed conviction, with confidence and hope. It will also be a good opportunity to intensify the **celebration** of the faith in the liturgy, especially in the Eucharist, which is "the summit towards which the activity of the Church is directed; ... and also the source from which all its power flows." At the same time, we make it our prayer that believers' **witness** of life may grow in credibility. To rediscover the content of the faith that is professed, celebrated, lived and prayed, and to reflect on the act of faith, is a task that every believer must make his own, especially in the course of this Year.



MEMORY VERSE

*"Everyone who calls on the name
of the Lord will be saved." Romans 10:13*

Faith-Sharing Questions

Share and/or discuss the following questions.

1. The remembrance of their alien status prompted the Israelites to treat the alien or foreigner with kindness. How do I regard the alien in my country?
2. What am I doing to show respect and gratitude to God for our land with its bountiful resources?
3. The reading from Romans tells us to confess Jesus as Lord, and it also implies that we live our lives according to this belief. Besides praying and going to church, how do I live my life that demonstrates Jesus is Lord of my life?
4. "For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all, enriching all who call upon him." If I truly believe this, how does this affect my attitude toward people of different religions and races? How does this affect how I understand God?
5. What temptations have I experienced that are similar to those Jesus experienced in today's Gospel? How did I respond?

Living as Disciples

*Select one or more of the following actions and be prepared
to share with your small group next week.*

1. Deepen your understanding of Scripture by taking advantage of the opportunities for Bible study offered in your parish or diocese.
2. The next time you attend Mass, remember that Eucharist means thanksgiving and make a conscious effort to thank God for the many gifts you have received.

Continued on next page

3. Be welcoming to a new parishioner, neighbor, or co-worker.
4. Throughout Lent contribute to Catholic Relief Services (CRS) through Operation Rice Bowl to help those in need.
5. Pray the Memory Verse each day.

Closing Prayer & Ritual

*Gather around a prayer table with a Bible, crucifix, and a candle.
(Provide paper and pens for each person.)*

Leader: Lord God, as we begin these 40 days of Lent, help us to be filled with gratitude for your salvation, deliverance, and faithfulness. Help us to keep the commitments we have made to pray, fast, and give alms this Lent.

Response (R): We thank you, Lord.

Reader 1: For calling us to be your sons and daughters in Jesus Christ...(R/)

Reader 2: For giving us an example in resisting the temptations of the devil...(R/)

Reader 3: For saving us by your death on the cross...(R/)

Reader 4: For always protecting us and keeping us under the shadow of your wings...(R/)

Reader 5: For the grace to proclaim that "Jesus is Lord." (R/)

Each person will write his/her Lenten promises on a piece of paper. Those who wish may share their responses with the group. After each sharing, all respond, "Be with (name of person), O Lord."

This paper can be taken home as a reminder to keep your promises.

Conclude by praying the Our Father. Share a sign of peace.

Optional: Sing the hymn, "Throughout These Forty Days of Lent."

2nd Sunday of Lent CYCLE C

Readings

*Genesis 15:5-12, 17-18
Psalm 27:1, 7-9, 13-14
Philippians 3:17-4:1
Luke 9:28b-36*

Opening Prayer

Jesus, you enlightened and transformed the apostles through the Transfiguration experience. As they entered the "cloud of unknowing," they received insight into your being and your love. Bring us to that kind of intimacy that will draw us closer to you. Amen.

Commentary on the Word of God

Last week we reflected on the temptation of Christ, which we can understand as a foreshadowing of his Passion. This week we see the glory of Jesus, which anticipates the Resurrection. These two alternating themes set the direction of our Lenten readings and help to prepare us for both the Passion and the Resurrection.

Faith and trust in God

Abram (not yet given his longer name Abraham - see Genesis 17) tells God, "O Lord God, what good will your gifts be, if I keep on being childless and have as my heir the steward of my house, Eliezer?" (Genesis 15:2). God not only reiterates his promise of innumerable descendants, but also specifically assures Abram that his own issue will be his heir. Abram has complete faith and trust in God and puts aside all his doubts and anxiety. This total reliance puts Abram in right relationship with God.

God also promises Abram "this land" (cf 15:7-12). Abram asks for a sign and receives a confirmation in the form of a covenant oath and ritual (cf 15:9-11, 17-20). The ritual of cutting animals in two and walking between the pieces bound the parties in covenant. If they failed to keep the terms of the covenant, then they were doomed to share the same fate as the animal. Chapter 15 thus confirms God's covenant with Abram: he will have a son, he will have many descendants, and one day he will possess the land.

This week's text reminds us that Abraham and Sarah did not come to such faith easily but against the constant backdrop of barrenness and hopelessness. An important point of the story is that faith is a continuous,