

March 10, 2019
First Sunday of Lent
Luke 4:1-13

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert for forty days, to be tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and when they were over he was hungry. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'"

Then he took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a single instant. The devil said to him, "I shall give to you all this power and their glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I may give it to whomever I wish. All this will be yours, if you worship me." Jesus said to him in reply, "It is written: 'You shall worship the Lord, your God, and him alone shall you serve.'"

Then he led him to Jerusalem, made him stand on the parapet of the temple, and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,' and: 'With their hands they will support you, lest you dash your foot against a stone.'" Jesus said to him in reply, "It also says, 'You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.'"

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

Background:

Luke ends his description of the Baptism of Jesus with the voice of God proclaiming: "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." (Luke 3:22) At the time of Jesus, people believed that such a statement would have been heard throughout the spirit world. It was their understanding that numerous evil spirits roamed about creating havoc on human beings. The first verses of the Book of Job contain a dialogue between Satan and God that illustrates the thinking of the ancient peoples regarding the role of evil spirits in their world:

"One day, when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, Satan also came among them. And the Lord said to Satan, "Whence do you come?" Then Satan answered the Lord and said, "From roaming the earth and patrolling it." And the Lord said to Satan, "Have you noticed my servant Job, and that there is no one on earth like him, blameless and upright, fearing God and avoiding evil?" But Satan answered the Lord and said, "Is it for nothing that Job is God-fearing? Have you not surrounded him and his family and all that he has with your protection? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his livestock are spread over the land. But now put forth your hand and touch anything that he has, and surely he will blaspheme you to your face." (Job 1:6-11)

These ancient people would expect that the evil spirits would respond to God's statement of confidence and delight in Jesus with a challenge, to see if Jesus proves to truly be the person that God has claimed.

The temptations themselves can be seen as an attempt to get Jesus to use power -- personal, social, and religious -- in a way that would align him with the elite and powerful of the day. Rejecting the use of power aligns Jesus with the peasants. Luke is setting the stage for the rest of Jesus' ministry through the choices that Jesus makes. Unlike the Jewish people who went into the wilderness and repeatedly complained and abandoned their relationship with Yahweh, Jesus remains faithful. He is the "one more powerful" that John spoke of. "I am baptizing you with water, but one mightier than I is coming. I am not worthy to loosen the thongs of his sandals." (Luke 3:16) Luke ends his account of Jesus' temptation with the suggestion that the tempter left Jesus but will look for another opportunity to return. That opportunity will come at the crucifixion.

Reflection Questions:

1. When you think of your own periods of hardships...
2. Are there people that you admire for how they have dealt with hardships in their lives?
3. If you were to consider that it was the Holy Spirit who was leading you into a place of temptation...
4. Because Jesus dealt with temptations...

5. Why do you think we begin every Lent with a gospel reading that focuses on Jesus being tempted?
6. As I enter this season of Lent, I expect...
7. Can you take some time now to talk with God about the difficult periods in your life, your attitude of entering another Lenten season, or some other concern that arose from this gospel text?

The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to annemarie.lom@gmail.com

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Excerpts from the readings for March 10, 2019, the First Sunday of Lent

Moses spoke to the people, saying: "The priest shall receive the basket from you and shall set it in front of the altar of the Lord, your God. Then you shall declare before the Lord, your God, 'My father was a wandering Aramean who went down to Egypt with a small household and lived there as an alien. But there he became a nation great, strong, and numerous. When the Egyptians maltreated and oppressed us, imposing hard labor upon us, we cried to the Lord, the God of our fathers, and he heard our cry and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. He brought us out of Egypt with his strong hand and outstretched arm, with terrifying power, with signs and wonders; and bringing us into this country, he gave us this land flowing with milk and honey. Therefore, I have now brought you the firstfruits of the products of the soil which you have given me.' And having set them before the Lord, your God, you shall bow down in his presence."

Be with me, Lord, when I am in trouble. You who dwell in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty, say to the Lord, "My refuge and fortress, my God in whom I trust."
No evil shall befall you, nor shall affliction come near your tent,
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.
You shall tread upon the asp and the viper; you shall trample down the lion and the dragon.
Because he clings to me, I will deliver him; I will set him on high because he acknowledges my name.
He shall call upon me; I will answer him; I will be with him in distress, and deliver him and glorify him.

Brothers and sisters: What does Scripture say? The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart—that is, the word of faith that we preach—for, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. Scripture says, No one who believes in him will be put to shame. There is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all. "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

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"If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written: He will command his angels to guard you, and: With their hands they will support you, lest you dash your foot against a stone."

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