

Scripture Study

First Sunday of Lent – Cycle B



Opening prayer

Genesis 9:8-15

(Ps 25:4-9)

1 Peter 3:18-22

Mark 1:12-15

Overview of the Gospel:

- This Sunday's Gospel reading takes place right after Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River by John the Baptist (verses 9-11). Somewhat more detailed accounts of this event are given in the other synoptic gospels of Matthew (4:1-11) and Luke (4:1-13).
- In the same way that Adam was tempted in the garden "among wild beasts" and the children of Israel were tempted in the wilderness, Jesus undergoes a very real temptation by Satan, whose name means "adversary" (1 Peter 5:8, RSV-CE) or "accuser" (Revelation 12:10). Jesus, however, out of love for his Father (Mk 1:11), succeeds where Adam and Israel failed.
- The arrest of John (verse 14; Matthew 14:1-12) is a key event in the gospels, marking a shift in Jesus' ministry from Judea, in the south, to the Galilee region of the north. John's arrest also foreshadows Jesus' own arrest leading to his trial and crucifixion.
- "The kingdom of God" refers to God's sovereign rule over all the nations through Jesus. It is idealized by the Old Testament Davidic kingdom at its height which ruled not only over the twelve tribes of Israel (2 Samuel 5:1-5; Matthew 19:28) but exercised control and influence over gentile (non-Jewish) nations (1 Kings 4:20-21; Matthew 28:18-20). The kingdom that Jesus announces will, through his death on the cross, turn this ideal into a spiritual reality (Ephesians 2:11-22).

Questions:

- In the 2nd reading, what inference does St. Peter draw about baptism from the story of Noah? By what power does he say this is accomplished?
- What is the significance of the number "forty" in Mark 1:13? What other great events in salvation history revolve around this number (Genesis 7:11-12; Exodus 25:15-18; Numbers 15:26-35; 1 Kings 19:1-8)?
- What is the common preaching theme of John the Baptist (Mark 1:2-4), Jesus (verse 15), and the first disciples (Acts 2:37-38)? What does it mean to "repent"?
- Why do you think it is important for us to hear about Jesus' temptation by Satan in the wilderness? What benefit is it for us to undergo our own temptations (Hebrews 12:3-11; James 1:2-4)?
- Besides Satan, where do temptations come from (1 John 2:15-17; Romans 7:15-25a)?
- After his temptation, Jesus was ministered to by angels (verse 13). When we have successfully resisted temptation, are we able to see how God sustains and rewards us? How?
- Both John the Baptist (Mark 1:6) and Jesus followed practices of self-discipline for religious reasons. What self-disciplining practices do you use for religious reasons? How have they influenced your own "change of heart" (repentance)?

Catechism of the Catholic Church: §§ 362, 374-79, 396-411, 538-40, 1427-39, 2043, 2846-49

Closing prayer

It is necessary that temptations should happen; for who shall be crowned but he that shall lawfully have fought, and how shall a man fight if there be none to attack him? --St. Bernard

Remember to read and meditate on the daily Mass readings!

Jesus was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan

Gospel Reading: *Mark 1:12-15*

Meditation: What is the significance of Jesus spending 40 days and nights of solitude, prayer and fasting in the Judean wilderness? In the Old Testament 40 days was often seen as a significant period of testing and preparation for entering into a covenant relationship with God. In the days of Noah, God judged the earth and destroyed its inhabitants in a great flood because of their idolatry and total rejection of God. Noah and his family were spared because they obeyed God and took refuge in the ark for 40 days. When the flood subsided God made a covenant with Noah and promised that he would not destroy the human race again. Jesus came to fulfill that promise. When God freed the Israelites from slavery in Egypt he brought them into the wilderness of Sinai. Moses went to the mountain of the Lord at Sinai and stayed there in prayer and fasting for 40 days (Exodus 24:18). At the conclusion of this 40 day encounter God made a covenant with Moses and the people. After the prophet Elijah had confronted idolatry in the land of Israel and destroyed the 400 priests of Baal, he fled into the wilderness and journeyed for 40 days to mountain of God at Sinai. There God spoke with Elijah and commissioned him to pass on the work of restoration of true worship of God in the land (1 Kings 19:8). After Jesus was anointed by the Spirit in the waters of the Jordan River, he journeyed to the wilderness of Judea for 40 days to prepare himself for the mission which the Father sent him to accomplish in establishing a new covenant that would supersede all the previous covenants which God had made with his people.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell us in their gospel accounts that Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness. Mark states it most emphatically: "The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness" (Mark 1:12). Why was Jesus compelled to seek solitude for such a lengthy period? Was it simply a test to prepare him for his ministry? Or did Satan want to lure him into a trap? The word tempt in English usually means to entice to sin. The scriptural word here also means test in the sense of proving and purifying someone to see if there are ready for the task at hand. God tests his



servants to see if they are fit to be used by him. God tested Abraham to prove his faith. The Israelites were sorely tested in Egypt before God delivered them from their enemies. Jesus was no exception to this testing. Satan, in turn, did his best to entice Jesus to choose his own will over the will of his Father. Despite his weakened condition, due to fatigue and lack of food for 40 days, Jesus steadfastly rejected Satan's subtle and not so subtle temptations. Where did Jesus find his strength to survive the desert's harsh conditions and the tempter's seduction? He fed on his Father's word and found strength in doing his will. Satan will surely tempt us and will try his best to get us to choose our will over God's will. If he can't make us renounce our faith or sin mortally, he will then try to get us to make choices that will lead us, little by little, away from what God wants for us.

As soon as John the Baptist had finished his ministry, Jesus began his in Galilee, his home district. Jesus proclaimed that the time of restoration proclaimed by the prophets was now being fulfilled in his very person and that the kingdom of God was at hand. What is the kingdom of God? The word "kingdom" means something more than a territory or an area of land. It literally means "sovereignty" or "reign" and the power to "rule" and exercise authority. The prophets announced that God would establish a kingdom not just for one nation or people but for the whole world. God sent us his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, not to establish an earthly kingdom but to bring us into his heavenly kingdom – a kingdom ruled by justice, truth, peace, and holiness. The kingdom of God is the central theme of Jesus' mission. It's the core of his gospel message.

How do we enter the kingdom of God? In announcing the good news, Jesus gave two explicit things each of us must do to in order to receive the kingdom of God: *repent* and *believe*. When we submit to Christ's rule in our lives and believe the gospel message, the Lord Jesus gives us the grace and power of Holy Spirit to live a new way of life as citizens of God's kingdom. Jesus gives us grace and conviction to renounce sin and Satan, the father of lies (John 8:44) and the ruler of this present world (John 12:31). That is why repentance is the first step. Repentance means to change – to change my way of thinking, my attitudes and disposition, and the choices I determine for my life, so that Christ can be the Lord and Master of my heart rather than sin, greed, and selfishness. If we are only sorry for the consequences of our sins and bad choices, we will very likely keep repeating them. True repentance requires a contrite heart (Psalm 51:17) – a true sorrow for sin and a firm resolution to avoid it in the future. The Lord Jesus gives us grace to see sin for what it really is – a rejection of his love and wisdom for our lives and a refusal to do what is good and in accord with his will. His grace brings pardon, healing, and help for turning away from everything that would keep us from his love and truth. To *believe* is to take Jesus at his word and to recognize that God loved us so much that he sent his only begotten Son to free us from bondage to sin and harmful desires. God made the supreme sacrifice of his Son on the cross to bring us back to a relationship of peace and friendship with himself. He is our Father and he wants us to live as his sons and daughters. God loved us first and he invites us in love to surrender our lives to him. Do you believe that the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, has power to free you from bondage to sin and fear?

"Lord Jesus, your word is life and joy for me. Fill me with your Holy Spirit that I may have the strength and courage to embrace your will in all things and to renounce whatever is contrary to it."

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