

# Read

Genesis 2:7-9; 3:1-7

Psalm 51:3-4, 5-6,  
12-13, 17

Romans 5:12-19 or 5:12,  
17-19

Matthew 4:1-11

## LIVING THE WORD

### First Sunday of Lent

February 26, 2023



#### REFLECTION

We begin the forty days of Lent by remembering Jesus' temptations during his forty days in the desert. Jesus willingly suffered temptation so that he could unite himself with us, becoming like us in all things but sin. Jesus was tempted so that he could accompany us even in our temptations.

The Church calls Jesus the "new Adam" because of the reverse parallels between the book of Genesis and the Gospels. For example, the old Adam was tempted in the garden, succumbed to sin, and was driven into the desert. Christ, the New Adam, allows himself to be tempted in the desert so that he can show us the way into the garden of heaven.

If you ever feel guilty for being tempted to do something awful, take comfort in knowing that since Jesus was tempted, we know temptation itself is not sinful! What matters is what we do when faced with temptation. The forty days of Lent are a kind of exercise program to build up strength against temptation. This is a time to be tested and to test ourselves by taking on spiritual disciplines and small sacrifices. We deny ourselves in little things now to build up the strength of will and purpose we need to deny ourselves when it matters most.



#### ACTION

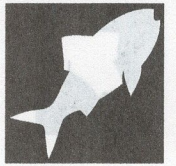
Jesus withstood both physical and spiritual temptations in the desert. Which do you find harder to resist? Practice self-discipline by choosing to give something up (fasting), to serve others (alms), or to adopt a daily spiritual practice (prayer). Make sure that your Lenten practice corresponds to some area that you need strength in, perhaps some temptation that you find yourself constantly faced with. For example, if you are tempted to get in social media arguments, fast from (give up) social media and take up a practice of prayer or service during the time you would usually spend online.

"Lent is the autumn of the spiritual life during which we gather fruit to keep us going for the rest of the year."

—St. Francis de Sales 

#### ? QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today's readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ Which temptations do I find most difficult to resist—physical or spiritual?
- ❖ Jesus quotes Scripture to answer temptation. Does it help to have answers ready for the temptations we might face?



## The Season

Lent is a season that captures the hearts and minds of Catholics each year, perhaps surprisingly so, since it is a season of penitence, of reordering, and of gaining new focus in our lives as Christians. And yet, maybe this is exactly why the season is so popular. We all know that we fall short in our lives as Christ's disciples. Lent offers an annual time in which to get our act together. This forty-day period in which to turn our lives more fully toward Christ provides a designated time in which to turn away from sin, to participate in specific, traditional practices that will aid our spiritual growth, and to embrace ongoing conversion in Christ as the pattern of our lives.

The roots of the season as preparation for the initiation of the elect as they journey toward the Easter Vigil help to bring the season to life. As thousands of people throughout the world prepare for initiation, we grasp more fully the blessing and challenge of our own Baptism, and commit ourselves to Christ to a greater degree with our lives.

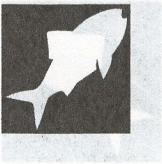
This year, we are in the cycle of Year A readings, which means that the Gospel readings heard on the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Sundays of Lent are used in the celebration of the scrutinies with the elect, those preparing for baptism at the Easter Vigil. Find out and share the names of those preparing for baptism with the young people and encourage them to pray for them during this season.

## Celebrating Lent with Teens

The focus of Lent, with our admission that we sometimes fail to live as Christ's people, is particularly appealing to teens who are ready to take their lives of faith more seriously. It is helpful to remind them that the season is not wholly focused on giving up, but rather might be approached as taking up a practice or habit that will contribute to greater Christian living in the future. The traditional acts of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving or works of charity provide the necessary structure by which young people may fully participate in the season. Inviting teens to intentionally embrace the season by participating in the liturgies, making and keeping Lenten resolutions, and reflecting weekly on the Gospel will enhance their spiritual growth as individuals and as members of the faith community.

## Preparing the Liturgical Environment

The liturgical color for Lent is violet, and the Lenten environment is often bare of other adornment, as a means of furthering the reflective and penitential tone of the season. You might include a few bare branches and a crucifix to enhance the Lenten focus for your prayer. It is possible to add a small element each week to draw out the Gospel message, or simply include a Bible or Lectionary, open to the Gospel passage for Sunday.



February 26, 2023

# FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

## LECTIONARY #22A

Genesis 2:7-9; 3:1-7

Psalms 51:3-4, 5-6, 12-13, 17

Romans 5:12-19 or 5:12, 17-19

Matthew 4:1-11

## Prepare for the Word

*The following elements may be used by the catechist, teacher, or youth minister to prepare to facilitate today's session with teens. You may integrate this information into the reflection and discussion on today's readings.*

### Leader's Context

In this Gospel passage, we hear the story of Jesus' temptation in the desert. This story is significant because it emphasizes Jesus' humanity. We often focus most closely on Jesus' divinity. However, we read that he was tempted just as we are all tempted. Jesus is tempted to turn stones into bread to feed himself while in the desert. He is also tempted to call on angels to help him if he falls down the mountain. Jesus' last temptation is to bow down and worship the devil. Jesus has rebuttals to all of the temptations. He remains strong in the face of the devil. In his perfection, he was able to resist, but we are not always as fortunate.

**Q FOCUS:** *As we begin our Lenten journey, we learn that Jesus also was tempted to sin.*

### Liturgical Calendar Connection

We celebrated Ash Wednesday this past week, and in doing so, we have marked the beginning of the Lenten season. Lent is a period of six weeks leading up to Easter, during which we prepare our hearts and minds for the passion of Jesus, his death and resurrection. We commit to engaging in prayer, almsgiving, and fasting during this time of preparation. This first week of Lent is only the beginning of our journey. The church building is decorated sparsely and uses the color purple, signifying repentance. The priest will wear purple vestments as well.

Just as we have changed the physical appearance of our parish spaces, we are also called to change our interior spaces as well—our hearts and minds to reorient them toward God.

### Church Teaching Connection

“Satan suggests a triumphal messianism to him [Jesus], consisting in such spectacular wonders as turning stones into bread, throwing himself down from the pinnacle of the temple without suffering injury, achieving instantaneous political control over all the kingdoms of the world. But Jesus' choice, in total obedience to the Father's will, is clear and unequivocal: he accepts being the suffering, crucified Messiah who will give his life for the world's salvation” (Pope John Paul II, General Audience, June 3, 1998).

## Hear the Word

*Use this resource, a Lectionary, or a Bible to proclaim the reading. The book should be held reverently or placed on a lectern. If possible, light a candle that is placed near where the Gospel will be proclaimed. Gesture for teens to stand.*

### Gospel Acclamation

*Use the same musical setting that is used in your parish or at school Masses. Teens may help with music and proclaim the Gospel.*

**Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ, king of endless glory.**

### Gospel

*Matthew 4:1-11*

**Reader:** A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.

**All:** Glory to you, O Lord.

*All make the Sign of the Cross on their forehead, lips, and heart.*

At that time Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was hungry. The tempter approached and said to him, “If you are

the Son of God, command that these stones become loaves of bread.” He said in reply, “It is written: / *One does not live on bread alone, / but on every word that comes forth / from the mouth of God.*”

Then the devil took him to the holy city, and made him stand on the parapet of the temple, and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written: / *He will command his angels concerning you / and with their hands they will support you, / lest you dash your foot against a stone.*” / Jesus answered him, “Again it is written, *You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.*” Then the devil took him up to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in their magnificence, and he said to him, “All these I shall give to you, if you will prostrate yourself and worship me.” At this, Jesus said to him, “Get away, Satan! It is written: / *The Lord, your God, shall you worship / and him alone shall you serve.*”

Then the devil left him and, behold, angels came and ministered to him.

**Reader:** The Gospel of the Lord.

**All:** Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

*Everyone may be seated.*

## Reflect on the Word

*When beginning the reflection and discussion about today's readings, first refer to the handout for today. Ask teens what they learned about themselves and about Christian discipleship from performing the action for the week and journaling. Ask teens about the readings of the day: What struck them? What do they think the readings mean? How do the readings affect their own lives? Then begin the following reflection:*

► **What are some ways that the Gospels show us Jesus is fully divine?**

It is often easy to view Jesus as fully divine. He performed miracles, including raising Lazarus from death and healing a blind man and a paralyzed man. Miracles, by their very nature, point to God's power working in the world. Only God performs miracles; therefore Jesus is God. The stories that we hear, the lessons that we learn, all point to Jesus as being fully divine, as having miraculous powers that we, as humans, do not and cannot possess.

► **What are some ways that the Gospels show us Jesus is fully human?**

Sometimes it is more difficult to view Jesus as fully human—as a toddler or a teenager, as an adult who was faced with the temptation to sin. As a person with friends who cried when his friend Lazarus died. As someone who needed time by himself to pray and reflect.

Because Jesus was both fully divine and fully human, he was all of those things. He was capable of performing incredible miracles. He rose on the third day from the dead. He is God, but he was also human. We are taught that Jesus had free will because he was fully human. He was not God's puppet. He was a human being, like all of us, facing the same struggles, obstacles and difficulties. We hear in this Gospel that the Spirit drove Jesus into the desert, where he is tempted by Satan. Jesus feels what we feel. He is tempted to choose the wrong path and the easy way. As God, he has so many tools at his disposal, and he could have used those powers and abilities to be selfish, greedy, and to do evil. But, he chose not to and instead cooperated with God's divine will.

► **How does knowing Jesus was both fully human and fully divine shape your relationship with him?**

Jesus remains in the desert for forty days, and this influenced how we come to our modern understanding of the Lenten season. Lent lasts for forty days and is focused on resisting temptation, on allowing our hearts to be purified by God. We have to allow God's grace and mercy to flow through us to others, and in order to do so, we too must turn away from sin and temptation. The word “conversion” originates from the Latin word meaning to turn around or transform. Lent is all about conversion—turning away from sin and turning toward God. In turning toward God, we transform our hearts and our whole beings.

► **What are some practical ways you can use Lent as a time to strengthen your resolve against sin?**

## Wrapping It Up

Consider these points to conclude the discussion and reflection. Integrate the thoughts and ideas that surfaced during the discussion as well as the “Church Teaching Connection” on page 134.

**Jesus knows what we are going through because he was fully human.**

**Jesus offers us salvation because he is fully divine.**

**How can we turn toward God during Lent?**

## Act on the Word

### Temptation Skits

For this activity, you will need some props for skits, newsprint, and small-group questions (included below) printed/written on pieces of paper for small-group discussion].

Divide the teens into small group of four people. Each small group should think up a scenario that teens often face when dealing with temptation (such as peer pressure to drink or do drugs, temptation to tease or bully another person, temptation to lie to their parents, and so on). Once they come up with a scenario, instruct them that they will act out the scenario for the group with two different endings. They must assign roles and develop an improvised script. The group will present two scenarios: one with the young people giving into the particular temptation in the skit and one with the young people resisting temptation. Following each skit, lead a large-group discussion that includes:

- ✳ When the person gave into the temptation, what sort of consequences might you foresee occurring?
- ✳ Could you relate to either ending to the scenario? Why or why not?
- ✳ As a friend, how might you help someone navigate the situation in the skit?

If there is still time that remains, give each group a large piece of newsprint. Instruct the teens to assign a notetaker and to split the page into four quadrants. List the following questions in the quadrants, and have the group discuss them.

- ✳ What temptations do teens in the US primarily face in today’s society?
- ✳ What are tools that you employ to resist the temptations listed above?
- ✳ How can you help others resist the temptations that they face?
- ✳ What have you chosen to give up for Lent? Sometimes people decide to do something positive or a kind action. What might you choose to do more often so as to change your heart during Lent?

## Closing Prayer

*Christ our Lord,  
you resisted temptation  
throughout forty days in the desert.  
Be near us as we journey  
in the desert seeking your way and truth.  
May our Lenten disciplines mold us into  
truer disciples,  
and in temptation may we find strength in  
your love.  
We ask this through Christ our Lord Jesus  
Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you in the unity  
of the Holy Spirit,  
God, for ever and ever.  
Amen.*

## For Next Sunday

To help teens prepare for next Sunday’s Mass, print, email, or share on a blog or social media the handout found on the next page. The JPG and PDF files are available at [www.ltp.org/lwgr](http://www.ltp.org/lwgr). Encourage teens to attend Mass with family or friends.