

# Read

Genesis 9:8-15

Psalm 25:4-5, 6-7, 8-9

1 Peter 3:18-22

Mark 1:12-15

## LIVING THE WORD

### First Sunday of Lent

February 18, 2024



#### REFLECTION

What is driving you? Is it your passions and desires? Is it the expectations of others? Do the temptations of this world for power, wealth, and security fuel your actions? What is motivating you?

On this First Sunday of Lent, we read that the Holy Spirit is driving Jesus, straight to the desert. In the desert he will encounter temptation by Satan, meet wild beasts, and be cared for by angels. This doesn't sound like an ideal place, yet it is a powerful reminder of what we face in the world and how God continues to care for us. In the desert there are obstacles, but from them there is also growth and transformation as the Spirit sustains Jesus against these temptations and dangers. Immediately after his time in the desert, Jesus begins his public ministry, preaching the Good News.

With this Gospel reading in mind, how will you enter this Lent? Are you willing to be led by the Holy Spirit to a place of growth and transformation? Are you willing to encounter discomfort and inconvenience so that you might encounter something beautiful and true? Allow this time in the desert of Lent, with its challenges and temptations, to form you into the person God is calling you to be. Don't be afraid to go to the desert; Jesus is waiting for you there.



#### ACTION

The three pillars of Lent are prayer, fasting and almsgiving. As you enter Lent this year, make a commitment to be led by the Holy Spirit in prayer. Ask God what type of fast is beneficial to your spiritual growth. Be generous in your giving. These practices should test you and refine your spiritual life so that you can grow and become a better witness of Jesus' message.

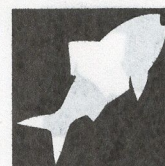


Check out this short video about Lent. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xo1mjuy1NA0>

#### ? QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today's readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ Reflect on the main motivators in your life. How can they include the Holy Spirit?
- ❖ What are you afraid of this Lent? How can you use that fear to help you grow?





## 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.

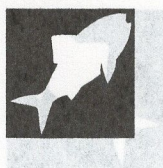
## Celebrating Lent with Teens

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 18, 2024

## FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

### LECTIONARY #23B

Genesis 9:8-15

Psalms 25:4-5, 6-7, 8-9

1 Peter 3:18-22

Mark 1:12-15

## 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

Today's Gospel is the shortest version of the temptation of Jesus in the desert. This takes place right after the baptism of Jesus but before he begins his public ministry. This version does not mention a lot of details the other accounts do (for example, the versions in Mt 4:1-11 and Lk 4:1-13 provide specifics about the three temptations of Jesus). Our reflection today goes through those other accounts, helping the young people see that we face the same types of temptations still today. Mark's account of this story also teaches us some important things, like the fact that God is always with us and that we are called to repent. Jesus endured this period of testing, and we can, too, when we trust in God's presence and grace.

**Q** **FOCUS:** *Temptation can be overcome.*

### Liturgical Calendar Connection

The practice of Ember Days was part of the Church's tradition for many centuries. Every quarter, for three days the Church would set aside time for additional prayer, fasting, and abstinence. They were a time of spiritual renewal and provided an opportunity for communities to give thanks to God for the goodness of creation and the cycle of nature and the harvest. In past centuries, these days of fasting were observed by the whole Church, but since the Second Vatican Council the practice is no longer required everywhere. Nevertheless, Catholics today can still choose to observe these days on their own. The dates for the

Ember Days occur on the Wednesday (fasting), Friday (fasting and abstinence), and Saturday (fasting) following St. Lucy's feast day (December 13), Ash Wednesday, Pentecost, and the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (September 14). You can think of it as a mini three-day retreat centered on prayer (particularly of thanksgiving), self-denial, and penance, to bring our hearts and minds back to God. The Lenten Ember Days are coming up this week!

### Church Teaching Connection

"This Gospel of the temptations of Jesus in the desert reminds us that the life of the Christian, in the footsteps of the Lord, is a battle against the spirit of evil. It shows us that Jesus willingly faced the Tempter, and defeated him. . . . We must be aware of the presence of this astute enemy, who seeks our eternal condemnation, our failure, and prepare to defend ourselves against him and to combat him. The grace of God assures us, with faith, prayer and penance, of our victory over the enemy" (Pope Francis, Angelus Message, February 21, 2021).

## 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

Mark 1:12-15

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

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

*All make the sign of the cross on their forehead, lips, and heart.*



The Spirit drove Jesus out into the desert, and he remained in the desert for forty days, tempted by Satan. He was among wild beasts, and the angels ministered to him.

After John had been arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God: "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

**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:*

Today we hear that Jesus went out in the desert and was tempted by the devil. Does this surprise you? Jesus is, of course, without sin, but he knows what it is like to be tempted. Because he became human, he knows and understands what we go through; because he is still God, he does not sin and we should follow his example in resisting the temptation to fall into sin.

► In what situations are people your age most likely to experience the greatest temptations?

► What have you found to be helpful tools to fight against temptation?

The details of Jesus' temptations are not mentioned in today's Gospel passage from Mark, but they are in Matthew (Matthew 4:1–11) and Luke (Luke 4:1–13). We hear them in other years. We'll reflect on these temptations today because they will help us examine our own temptations and overcome them.

The first temptation is to turn stone into bread. Jesus had just been fasting for forty days and was hungry, so the devil is tempting him with instant gratification.

► In what ways does the current culture encourage instant gratification?

► What are some specific things teens can do to resist the temptation of instant gratification?

Another temptation is to jump from the temple and have the angels save him (the second temptation in Matthew and the third one in Luke). This is the temptation to test God. It's like the devil was saying "If God is so powerful, why wouldn't he keep you from falling and hurting yourself?"

► Does the following phrase ever cross your mind: "God, if you really love me, you should (fill in the blank)"? When we do this, how are we putting limits on God?

► What are some ways that teens test God? If people approach God with this type of attitude, how do you think it would affect their choices and interactions with others?

In the last temptation (third in Matthew, second in Luke) the devil promises Jesus all the kingdoms on earth if Jesus will worship him. This is the temptation of idolatry. Many people may not be tempted to actually worship the devil, but all of us are tempted all the time to put other people or things before God.

► What are some things that take the place of God in the lives of people your age?

► What are some things you can do to ensure that God stays as the top priority in your life?

When we spend time reflecting on these temptations and the ways they appear in our life, it can seem like we are constantly in spiritual warfare. Lent is a good time to reflect on what is pulling us away from God and return to him. We are meant to combat the lures of the devil and strive to cling to God. We aren't in it alone. In today's Gospel we heard how the angels ministered to Jesus. God sends us teachers and spiritual guides to help us remain firm in our faith. Our Lenten commitments of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving also help us in this effort. In Matthew and Luke, Jesus responds to the temptations by turning to Scripture. We are called to do the same by becoming familiar with God's Word and read it daily. And in today's reading from Mark, we hear Jesus' call to "Repent, and believe in the gospel." Lent is a great time to go to the sacrament of reconciliation. All of these practices can help in our daily battle against temptation.



## 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 138.

**Temptations will inevitably occur in the life of even the most faithful Christian. Be prepared.**

**God will give you the grace and help you need to resist temptation and live a life of holiness.**

**Allow this Lenten season to be a source of strength and spiritual renewal.**

## Act on the Word

### Lenten Practices and Commitment

For this activity, you will need several sheets of poster board, markers, index cards, and pens.

Divide the teens into small groups. Give each group three poster boards and markers. Instruct them to brainstorm ideas and make a list of different ways people their age can incorporate the three Lenten practices of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving into their daily lives. They will make one poster full of ideas for prayer, one for fasting, and one for almsgiving. Once all the groups are finished with their posters, have them present their ideas to the larger group.

After all ideas have been presented, distribute the index cards and pens and allow time for the young people to write out their personal commitments for Lent. Encourage them to take these commitments home and post them somewhere visible where they will see them every day. They could even take a picture of their list and make it the background image on their phone.

Before your time together finishes, decide on a group almsgiving project for Lent. Some ideas include a donation jar where teens can bring in money to be given to a church ministry or local organization, organizing a food or clothing drive, making cards to be sent to residents of a nursing home, and so on. Many parishes also have a parish-wide almsgiving project, like Catholic Relief Service's Rice Bowl, which the teens could participate in as well.

## Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus,

lead us and guide us

as we enter into the forty days of Lent.

Through a faithful observance,

reveal what we need to know about

ourselves and,

through the ministry of angels,

help us to experience a true conversion  
of heart.

Who live and reign with God the Father,

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.