

# 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 21, 2021



#### REFLECTION

In today's Gospel, Jesus arrives in Galilee proclaiming, "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1:15). Jesus tells his followers that God is living and active in the very moment, and there is no time like the present to make God known, loved, and served. The same is true for us today. God is here. How do we choose to respond? The beginning of Lent is filled with opportunity. Now is the time to reflect on our relationship with God and decide how we wish to move forward throughout the season of Lent. Maybe God is inviting us to spend more time in quiet prayer. Maybe God is reminding us to show respect for our parents and siblings, even when it is difficult. Maybe God is urging us to think critically about the consequences of the decisions we make each day. Now is the time. What is God saying to you?



#### ACTION

One of Shakespeare's most remembered soliloquies comes from the play *Richard III*. "Now is the winter of our discontent" vividly describes a situation where times are going to change for the better. For Gloucester, the character who proclaims this speech, the dark winter of sadness transforms into a summer of new life and opportunity. This is the same reality we experience during the seasons of Lent and Easter. Imagine that you have the responsibility of explaining the relationship between Lent and Easter to a second or third grade student. How would you present this idea of transformation? What examples from your own life could you use to help the younger students relate? If you have younger family members, share your reflections with them.



Listen to Rend Collective's "*Build Your Kingdom Here*" and consider how you will respond to God's Kingdom this Lent.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sbdJXKqVgtg>



#### ? QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today's readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ How will your Lenten practices reflect your encounter with God?
- ❖ Why is it sometimes so difficult to recognize that the Kingdom of God is at hand?



# Introduction to **LENT**



## **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. 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.

If your parish celebrates the scrutinies on the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Sundays of Lent with the elect, those preparing for Baptism at the Easter Vigil, you can use the Appendix (see page 238) to find sessions and handouts to accompany the Year A readings that are used on those days.

## **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 21, 2021

## FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

### LECTIONARY #23B

Genesis 9:8-15

Psalm 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

In the readings for this first Sunday of Lent, we are invited into the mystery of Lent, which is a path to salvation. Just as our holy ancestors were promised never to be destroyed again through the floodwaters, we now enter into salvation through Baptism. As Jesus begins his ministry and inaugurates the Kingdom of God, we too are invited to walk his path into the forty-day observance of Lent, to face the things that tempt us and turn to our belief in God. Through our Lenten practices of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, we help to build up the Kingdom of God.

**Q FOCUS:** *God is present, here and now.  
Repent from sin and turn to God.*

### Liturgical Calendar Connection

Lent is a season of repentance. It is also a time to recall our Baptism and our Christian life. We are called to reaffirm our commitment to Christ by turning away from sin and toward God. Although this is particularly emphasized throughout Lent, it is something that we should do all year. The Lenten practices of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving help us to put this into action in our daily lives. Lent lasts until the beginning of the Triduum on Holy Thursday.

### Church Teaching Connection

"Lent is a time of renewal for the whole Church, for each community and every believer. Above all it is a 'time of grace' (2 [Corinthians] 6:2). God does not ask of us anything that he himself has not first given us. 'We love because he first has loved us' (1 [John] 4:19). He is not aloof from us. Each one of us has a place in his heart. He knows us by name, he cares for us and he seeks us out whenever we turn away from him. . . . The love of God breaks through that fatal withdrawal into ourselves which is indifference. . . . Christians are those who let God clothe them with goodness and mercy, with Christ, so as to become, like Christ, servants of God and others" (Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for Lent 2015).

## 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:*

The evangelist Mark often writes in brief and action-filled statements. In so few words he communicates a world of experience. The Spirit drives Jesus into the desert, where he will remain for forty days. It does not say what our Lord ate or drank, where he rested his head and found shelter, or what he did during those long, lonely days. However, Mark does give us some context for Jesus' situation; there are wild beasts as well as angels. As to what happened during the time, Mark simply says Jesus faced temptations by Satan.

And so we begin Lent. Today's Gospel reading gives us a sense of urgency and simplicity. Forty days in the desert of our faith. Driven by the Spirit. Tempted by the devil. Among the wild beasts. With the angels. Lent is a time of reflection and preparation. We await the joy of the Resurrection at Easter, knowing that we are all faced with temptations in this life. Just as Jesus overcame those temptations before beginning his ministry, we are called to turn away from sin and place our complete trust in God. Today's Gospel reading can help us to examine our lives and hearts throughout the season of Lent. Take a few moments in silence to consider the following questions:

- ▶ Do you feel the Holy Spirit driving you today?
- ▶ What are the greatest temptations you are facing?
- ▶ What are the wild beasts, the things that you seemingly cannot control?

▶ **What are the angels in your life? Who or what is supporting you today in your journey of faith?**

These questions, modeled on Jesus' own preparation for ministry, help us to recognize God's presence in our lives and the areas where we might be ignoring God's presence (temptations we face, etc.). In all these areas, Jesus' words in today's Gospel remind us that God is here with us, now and always.

Usually, when someone is giving a presentation, you want to pay attention to the first thing they say because it tells you why they are speaking and why it is important that you listen. Today's reading is at the very beginning of the Gospel of Mark. The words of Jesus are the first words that he speaks in this Gospel. They act as an opening statement, explaining why Jesus is here and why it is important that we listen to him. These words are the foundation for his ministry and give us a glimpse of what is to come. First, Jesus says that the time for God to fulfill his promise has come. In the Old Testament we hear of God's promise to send a messiah, God's chosen one who will redeem the people and allow them to once again be God's children, in spite of their sins. God fulfills his promise in Jesus Christ. Second, Jesus says that the Kingdom of God is here and now. God is present in the world, even though we might be blind to it because of sin.

▶ **Do these two statements reflect Jesus' ministry, as you know it from the rest of the Gospel?**

▶ **How would you describe Jesus' mission in one or two sentences?**

In addition to setting the tone for the rest of his ministry, Jesus also instructs the people on how to be a part of that Kingdom, which God has promised and is making a reality through the person of Jesus. First, *repent*—turn away from sin and give God your heart. Next, *believe*—place all your trust in God and the Good News that is Jesus Christ.

We have talked before about the notion of *metanoia* in relation to discipleship. In the Christian context, this Greek word means to have a change of heart, or a change of direction. It is a 180-degree turn, a total transformation of our lives. That is what Lent is all about. It is movement from repentance to belief. Lent is about the examination of our life and choices, moving our hearts so that we might change

our trajectory. It is not just a mental decision, but a physical choice that requires our body to move and change. That is why we choose to do physical things in Lent, like eat differently or give things up, so that the totality of our being will join in the *metanoia* of our hearts.

► How will you show God true repentance this Lent?

► How will you demonstrate your belief?

## 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.

**Jesus tells us that the Kingdom of God is all around us, here and now.**

**Jesus calls us to repentance and faith so that we can live a truly happy life.**

**We turn back to God through our Lenten commitments.**

## Act on the Word

### Putting Our Faith into Action

To prepare for this activity, visit Catholic Relief Services' website for their Rice Bowl program, <https://www.crsricebowl.org/>, to find resources and ideas for activities that your group can do related to Lent. Consider ordering rice bowls for the teens or have them create their own, so that teens have a concrete reminder of their Lenten practices.

Invite the teens to think about the three pillars of Lent: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Divide the young people into small groups and have them discuss how these three Lenten practices help us to repent and believe; what Jesus tells us to do in today's Gospel. Have them reflect on the following things:

- ✧ What are some things you have done in the past for these Lenten practices?
- ✧ In considering your Lenten practices this year, how would these actions connect you to the Kingdom of God that Jesus proclaims?
- ✧ How would they help to spread the Good News?

Bring the young people back together as a large group and have them share their reflections. Encourage them to spend time this week writing down their Lenten practice and how they will lead the young person closer to God.

Conclude the activity by having the group participate in some of the activities that Catholic Relief Services has on their website for Lent (<https://www.crsricebowl.org/>). Many of their resources help us to make the connection between our sacrifices during Lent and building up the Kingdom of God by serving the needs of others. As a group, participate in the Rice Bowl program this Lent.

## 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.  
You live and reign with God the Father,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one 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.