

Lent 2019 Year C Blessed Hunger, Holy Feast

Lent – a season of preparation (Lent One)
Dt 26:1-11; Rom 10:8-13; Luke 4:1-13; Ps 91

Lent is a season of 40 days when we get ready for Easter – Jesus’ resurrection. The number 40 has significance in the Bible. It’s used in contexts of testing, chastening, and probation. It’s used in a literal way, but it’s also symbolic meaning probation or trial. With the frequency of the number 40 in that Bible, it seems God has chosen this number to emphasize times of trouble, hardship, testing and preparation.

What are some Biblical examples, stories emphasizing the number 40?

The flood in Genesis was 40 days and nights.

Moses spent 40 years in Midian being prepared to lead Israel from Egypt to Canaan (Acts 7:30)

Moses was on Mt. Sinai for 40 days and 40 nights when he received the Law (Ex 24:18).

After Israel’s golden calf sin, Moses interceded 40 days & nights on Israel’s behalf. Dt 9:18, 25

The Law specified a maximum of 40 lashes that a man could receive for a crime (Dt 25:3).

It took the Israelite spies 40 days to spy out the Land of Canaan (Num 13:25).

The Israelites wandered in the desert 40 years before entering the Promised Land (Dt 8:2-5).

The nation of Israel served the Philistines for 40 years before Samson’s deliverance (Jd 13:1)

Goliath taunted Saul’s army for 40 days before David arrived to slay him (1 Sam 17:16).

After Elijah fled from Jezebel, he traveled 40 days and 40 nights to Mt. Horeb (1 Kg 19:8).

Jonah’s message to the Ninevites that God was giving them just 40 days to repent (Jon 3:4).

Jesus fasted 40 days & 40 nights in the wilderness before being tempted by Satan (Mt 4)

Jesus’ post-resurrection appearance lasted for 40 days; before His ascension (Acts 1:3, 9).

The period from the crucifixion of Christ to the destruction of Jerusalem totaled 40 years.

I list these many uses of the number 40 to remind us that this isn’t just another number or a series of coincidences. The number 40 has been recognized as being symbolically significant because of the frequency of its occurrence. And it’s always tied to an occasion of probation, chastisement, sin, or preparation.

For centuries Christians have read the story of Jesus’ temptations on the first Sunday of Lent, as a **season of repentance**, a time to take stock of our lives and the direction we’re headed, a time to concentrate on renewal. That’s exactly what Jesus did. The fact the temptations occurred in the wilderness is highlighted, because the wilderness is symbolic of times when life is difficult, dreary, dry and sad. But we must not forget four things.

First, We need to remember that temptation is tied to sin that needs repentance, when we fall short. We can get so caught up in dynamics of temptation we forget that sin needs repentance.

Second, If we do resist temptation, one victory doesn’t assure us that we have conquered temptations. We still need to be careful because temptation will come again, in any variety of forms and ways. Especially if we flirt with sin.

And **third**, Let’s remember we are more likely to drift off course in trying to achieve some thing positive than pursuing something obviously evil. At times, in order to do some thing positive, something good, we are tempted to do something bad. Sometimes we are tempted to do something good for a bad reason. Sometimes temptation calls us to do things that are not all bad, but contain some good. But the results are still sin that require repentance.

And **fourth**, repentance is more than just being sorry and apologizing. It's acknowledging the damage caused. It's resisting temptation when it comes again. It's trying to find ways to heal the hurt and the sin. And it's living differently. Turning around in our actions and attitudes.

There are a variety of ways to study or name Jesus' temptations. Each of them shed light on what temptation is, and how dangerous they are. Turning stones to bread point to: **lust of the flesh**. Ruling over all kingdoms point to: **lust of the eye**. And a spectacular jump from the temple: **pride of life**.

Another way to look at Jesus' temptations is to notice that immediately after his baptism; Jesus was led by the Spirit of God to be in the wilderness, **alone with himself**. The victories cited in the historic record point to inner struggles and to attacks from outside sources.

A mother once asked her son, "If we were in a store, and Dad and I were in one aisle, and you were in another aisle, and there was candy, and the devil said, "You should take some!" What would you say back to the devil?" The son smiled and without hesitation replied, "Oh! I would say thank you."

What happens when we are alone with no one but the hidden self for company? What do we do and think? What do we hide from others? A woman cleaned out her father's house after his death and was unhappily surprised at some things she came across. Do our greatest temptations come from without or from within?

The temptation to turn stones to bread points to the temptation that comes to everyone is to be **self-serving**. My rights. My way. Me first.

The temptation to bow down to Satan in order to rule all the kingdoms of the world highlights the human **lust for power and dominance**.

The temptation to make a spectacular jump from the pinnacle of the temple points to the **human need to be noticed or valued**.

It's important to note that Jesus overcame these temptations by affirming his **identity**, his clear **purpose**, and honoring, following **God's will** for humankind. Temptations have a way of clarifying who we really are.

Jesus went through a time of temptation, tiredness, and difficulty, as he prepared himself for his earthly ministry. He made sure of his connection, empowerment, & recognition with God the Father. Jesus began his ministry after wrestling with uncertainty, pain & doubt. He also overcame His demons, temptations and fears. He was getting ready for His ministry & ready for baptism before encountering people.

The value of Jesus' temptation story is not just Jesus the great moral example, the one who can put Satan in his place, wittily quoting scripture to stick it to him. But Jesus' responses to the devil help us see God more clearly. We see our Creator's values, methods and thinking. This event gives us tools to resist temptations. Let's look at the temptations from another angle.

First, the devil asked Jesus to turn the stones into bread. Jesus, led into battle by the Holy Spirit, the gentle, dove-like Spirit, suffered hunger. He didn't eat for forty days. Weakened, famished, the devil tempted Jesus' control over his physical desire. It's a temptation for Jesus to take away the physical suffering of the world. Surely, the millions who hunger, pray and long for God to take away their suffering, to turn stone into bread. Surely, God could do that.

Why doesn't our Creator do that? Perhaps we see that's our role, our work. Repentance, returning to God, involves sharing and caring, justice, serving others, giving & receiving care.

Second, the devil offered Jesus political power, the potential to do good on an enormous scale, the possibility of creating Utopia, the perfect community. The devil offered a kingdom of this world where justice & peace are compelled but not freely chosen by the people. Surely, the oppressed & exploited of the world, the victims

of war and violence, pray and long for God to act, to use his power to crush human power.

Why doesn't he? Maybe we see that it undermines the possibility for people to have authentic, close relationship, to be together united despite conflict and differences. But resisting temptation, repentance, returning to God, involves reconciling with others, and intentionally building up friendships.

And **Third**, the devil prompted Jesus to test God, to make God prove himself. If Jesus leaped from the top of the Temple, God would act to save Jesus. The religious authorities would fall in line behind Jesus. All people would recognize Jesus as Son of God. Surely, in a world where God often seems absent, those longing for proof of his existence long for God to reveal himself, to be clear about himself. And to let his vengeance reign on the unjust.

Why doesn't the Almighty do this? Maybe we see that it eliminates the journey to God. The devil wants Jesus to give us instant gratification instead of having us engage in the work of life. The devil says faith in God, trust in God, must be forced, coerced. But acknowledging sin, repentance, returning to God, involves growing & learning, a gradual change of heart and mind. Taking on God's values, habits, and thinking.

If Jesus had succumbed to any of the temptations, he would have diminished human dignity and his vision of us as children of God. Instead, the good news is: by refusing the devil, Jesus affirmed that we are capable of caring for each other and sharing what we have; that we are capable of working together and being close to each other; that we are capable of growth and learning, and building the Kingdom of God

The author of Hebrews reminds us: "We do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet did not sin" (Heb 4:15; 2:17-18). So it's not an accident that the broader church starts Lent with Jesus' 40 days of meditation & then temptation by Satan in the

wilderness. Lent was chosen as a 40-day period of penitence, concentration, self examination, testing and preparation in our church calendar.

We do this, by listening to what the Bible tells us about Jesus' life, his teachings, his example, and his death. Also, it's not unusual for people to give up something for Lent. Some people have some kind of fast, like meatless Fridays, or give up drinking a favorite drink, or a favorite food like chocolate. Others work on ending a bad habit or even not do an acceptable habit like going on Facebook for 40 days. And some people deliberately choose to do more Bible reading than normal, or purposely take the time to focus on some type of devotional material. All this is done to prepare for Easter and to remind us who we are and who God is. It's a time to help us get out of our ruts.

A pastor shared about a church he served in Tennessee where an eccentric and flamboyant senior citizen impressed him with her intense commitment to the faith. She did not have a pietistic bone in her body, but her devotion was clear and articulate. One evening at a dinner party in her home people were animatedly discussing some theological idea. In the midst of the give and take, this lady's teenage daughter, probably frustrated with all the high-blown discussion of religion, asked, "Mother you talk about religion all the time. Why are you so religious anyway?"

This question brought a loud hush to the dining table. Her mother paused dramatically, pushed her chair back from the table, stood & responded. "Every morning before you are awake, I rise & walk into the living room. I lift my arms and ask, 'Who's in charge here?' The answer always comes back: 'Not you!' That's why I am religious. Because I am not in charge!" That's a great daily habit – a physical action to help remind ourselves of a spiritual reality!

A life of faith in Jesus begins with the realization that we are not in charge, and from there we can proceed to align ourselves to the One who is in charge. Jesus has declared to his

followers: Go into the world knowing who is in charge and what it means to act upon this knowledge! Jesus is clear, however, that to act on that knowledge is not always easy.

On this first Sunday of Lent, the Bible tells us that Jesus was in the wilderness for 40 days. He was struggling with who was in charge – him or Almighty God. He was tempted like we are so he can identify with our temptations. It was a time of decision making. So giving up something for Lent, or even doing some new task, is our way of reminding ourselves – Our Creator and Savior is in charge.

It's known and proven that some type of physical action, a habit like kneeling for prayer, or doing the sign of the cross, helps us focus and remember. That's one reason some type of Lenten habit can be very helpful.

A while back I watched a few documentaries on trains. The one about Japanese bullet trains was interesting on how they reduced accidents. But what really got my attention is that many, if not all the employees, at some point in their tasks, do an arm action. Please do it with me. (football tomahawk chop)

What the Japanese research discovered is that even with, or maybe especially with mundane repeated jobs, if the employees carried out this arm motion, they made fewer mistakes. In fact I think it reduced miscues by 90%. Conductors, mechanics, maintaining the rails, and so on, all do this action when they finish one task. Even the locomotive engineer, with every driving task. This mind body action sequence is key.

So it's not a stretch to say that physical religious habits, help us follow Jesus. Like praying before and maybe after meals. Bowing our heads in prayer. Just stop working and walk around for a few minutes between tasks, listening to God, stretching our muscles – as we offer a few prayers of thanks and for help. It does get tiring to watch football players – point to the sky when they participate in a good play - and then do all kinds of weird dances. But

still, it's a gesture of thanks and witness. Just like our offerings every Sunday and those offerings of time and love between Sundays.

So we could say, Lenten habits, help us prepare the way for Jesus' actions in our lives. They prepare us for the resurrection. And Lent starts with Jesus being tempted in the wilderness, alone with himself, examining his priorities.

Lent is when the Church most insistently calls us to gut-wrenching honesty against the backdrop of God's unlimited mercy. It is a time when we can discover how divided our hearts really are – between what we want and what God wants for us. This is the struggle Jesus faced - to remain pure of heart in order to live faithfully. Jesus was led into the wilderness to a time of spiritual struggle, just as we some times find ourselves in a place of spiritual struggle.

How did Jesus defeat our enemy, Satan? First, he fully submitted to the Almighty and His will for his life. Second, Jesus fully trusted the word of God – the Bible.

Lent is a time to deal with our separation from God, how we've missed the mark. Lent is the time to embrace the wilderness of our souls and renew our spiritual habits. It's not just a time of repentance, being sorry that we have drifted and succumbed to temptation. It's a time for change. The ultimate purpose of the wilderness and temptations is not only to develop a deep transforming faith, but to develop a profoundly energetic and rewarding intimate connection to God. So embrace the tradition of Lent.

Climb out of whatever spiritual rut you are in this Lenten season. You'll be amazed how clear your vision can be out there in the middle of that wilderness with no distractions. You will learn a great deal about yourself. You will learn a great deal about God. It may not be comfortable, but Jesus will be there beside you, every step of the way and help you have victory over temptations – just like he did. And you will find that God's hand delivers you.

**Suggested Lectionary Scriptures for today
Year C - 2019**

Deuteronomy 26:1-11 Offering First Fruits

“Then it shall be, when you enter the land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance, and you possess it and live in it, ² that you shall take some of the first of all the produce of the ground which you bring in from your land that the LORD your God gives you, and you shall put *it* in a basket and go to the place where the LORD your God chooses to establish His name.

³ You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time and say to him, ‘I declare this day to the LORD ^[a]my God that I have entered the land which the LORD swore to our fathers to give us.’ ⁴ Then the priest shall take the basket from your hand and set it down before the altar of the LORD your God.

⁵ You shall answer and say before the LORD your God, ‘My father was a ^[b]wandering Aramean, and he went down to Egypt and sojourned there, few in number; but there he became a great, mighty and populous nation. ⁶ And the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, and imposed hard labor on us.

⁷ Then we cried to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction and our toil and our oppression; ⁸ and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with great terror and with signs and wonders; ⁹ and He has brought us to this place and has given us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey.

¹⁰ Now behold, I have brought the first of the produce of the ground which You, O LORD have given me.’ And you shall set it down before the LORD your God, and worship before the LORD your God; ¹¹ and you and the Levite and the alien who is among you shall rejoice in all the good which the LORD your God has given you and your household.

Psalms 91 Security of the One Who Trusts in the LORD.

91 He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High

Will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.

² I will say to the LORD, “My refuge and my fortress,
My God, in whom I trust!”

³ *For it is He who delivers you from the snare of the trapper*

And from the deadly pestilence.

⁴ *He will cover you with His pinions,
And under His wings you may seek refuge;
His faithfulness is a shield and bulwark.*

⁵ *You will not be afraid of the terror by night,
Or of the arrow that flies by day;*

⁶ *Of the pestilence that ^[a]stalks in darkness,
Or of the destruction that lays waste at noon.*

⁷ *A thousand may fall at your side
And ten thousand at your right hand,
But it shall not approach you.*

⁸ *You will only look on with your eyes
And see the recompense of the wicked.*

⁹ ^[b]For you have made the LORD, my refuge,
Even the Most High, your dwelling place.

¹⁰ No evil will befall you,
Nor will any plague come near your ^[c]tent.

¹¹ For He will give His angels charge concerning you,
To guard you in all your ways.

¹² They will bear you up in their hands,
That you do not strike your foot against a stone.

¹³ You will tread upon the lion and cobra,
The young lion and the ^[d]serpent you will trample down.

¹⁴ “Because he has loved Me, therefore I will deliver him;

I will set him *securely* on high, because he has known My name.

¹⁵ “He will call upon Me, and I will answer him;

I will be with him in ^[e]trouble;
I will rescue him and honor him.

¹⁶ “With ^[f]a long life I will satisfy him
And ^[g]let him see My salvation.”

Romans 10:8-13

⁸ But what does it say? “THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, IN YOUR MOUTH AND IN YOUR HEART”— that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, ⁹ ^[a]that if you confess with your mouth Jesus *as* Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; ¹⁰ for with the heart a person believes, ^[b]resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, ^[c]resulting in salvation. ¹¹ For the Scripture says, “WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE ^[d]DISAPPOINTED.” ¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same *Lord* is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; ¹³ for “WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.”

Luke 4:1-13 The Temptation of Jesus

⁴ Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led around ^[a]by the Spirit in the wilderness ² for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And He ate nothing during those days, and when they had ended, He became hungry. ³ And the devil said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, **tell this stone to become bread.**” ⁴ And Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE.’”

⁵ And he led Him up and showed Him all the kingdoms of ^[b]the world in a moment of time. ⁶ And the devil said to Him, “I will give You all this domain and ^[c]its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. ⁷ **Therefore if You worship before me, it shall all be Yours.**” ⁸ Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD AND SERVE HIM ONLY.’”

⁹ And he led Him to Jerusalem and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, **throw Yourself down from here;** ¹⁰ for it is written,

‘HE WILL COMMAND HIS ANGELS CONCERNING YOU TO GUARD YOU,’

¹¹ and,

‘ON *their* HANDS THEY WILL BEAR YOU UP, SO THAT YOU WILL NOT STRIKE YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE.’”

¹² And Jesus answered and said to him, “It is said, ‘YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST.’”

¹³ When the devil had finished every temptation, he left Him until an opportune time.

A young newly wed was sitting at his desk paying bills when he happened upon the credit card bill. As he scanned through the charges he noticed one particular charge to a department store for \$250. He called for his wife to join him. When she entered the room he asked her,

“How could you do this? What on earth did you buy for \$250?”

“Well,” she said, “I was standing in the department store looking for a dress. Then, I found myself trying it on. It was like the Devil was whispering to me, “Gee, you look great in this dress. You should buy it.”

“Well,” the young husband answered. “You should know how to deal with the Devil! Just tell him, ‘Get behind me, Satan!’”

“I did,” retorted the wife. “But then he said it looked great from the back too!”

Ah – Satan is clever!