

## **The First Sunday of Lent February 21, 2021**

Temptation and sin are realities that all of us face, no matter how far along we are on our spiritual journey. The devil tempts us because he wants us to fall away from God and lose hope. But, that doesn't have to happen if we keep turning to our Heavenly Father with confidence in His mercy.

In today's gospel, Jesus goes to the desert to confront Satan. Throughout Scripture, the wilderness is the place of temptation and testing. During their wanderings in the desert, the people of Israel fell to the temptation to worship a false God and to lose hope that He would provide for them during their journey. Though St Mark doesn't tell us how the devil tempted Jesus, we know from the other gospels that they were similar to the ones the people of Israel and all people face - namely, to turn to something other than God for our well-being, security, and hope. Jesus does not fall to temptation but vanquishes the devil. In doing so, He gives us assurance that we can do the same.

So, we can face temptation with confidence. It doesn't have any power over us because Jesus has already conquered Satan not only in the desert but by His cross and resurrection. Temptation only has power over us if we give in to it. If we resist it, push it out of our minds, and remind ourselves that Jesus has power over it, we can conquer our temptations. As St James tells us, "Submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7).

When we are tempted, we should always remember that Satan is the father of lies. At the core of every temptation is a lie. We might be deceived into thinking that giving in to sin will relax us and make us feel better. But, all sin can do is leave us feeling empty and guilty. Satan might whisper into our ear that it is only a small sin and nobody will get hurt. Then, consequences we didn't anticipate arise from our sinful acts and innocent people are hurt in the process. In any case, our relationship with God is always damaged whenever we give in to sin. So, whenever we are tempted, we should ask ourselves, "What is the lie that Satan wants me to believe?" When we bring that temptation into the light of truth, we will see it for what it really is and it will lose its power over us.

There are also powerful preventative measures we can take to inoculate us from temptation and strengthen us against it.

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Taking time to read the Bible every day is important to our spiritual health. When the devil tempted Him, Jesus used Scripture to counter his attack. When we meditate on Scripture, we are given the spiritual weapons we need to ward off Satan's attacks. Committing our favorite Bible passages to memory will keep our hearts attuned to God throughout the day and safe from temptation.

Another preventative measure is frequent reception of the sacraments. Every sacrament is a real encounter with the Risen Jesus who has conquered sin. When we receive the Eucharist, it is Jesus Himself who comes to dwell within us. If we carry Him within our hearts, we can be sure that the devil will stay far away from us. Also, going to confession frequently - as much as every month - will heal the wounds that sin leaves in our soul and strengthen us against temptation in the future. The more we turn to Jesus in this great sacrament of His mercy, the more we will come to detest sin and the less power it will have over us.

The season of Lent is an opportunity for us to face our sinful selves and turn to Jesus with confidence and trust. As we prepare for the celebration of Easter, we spend these weeks renewing our baptismal vow to reject Satan, and all his works, and all his empty promises. We reject the glamor of evil and refuse to be mastered by sin. Standing up to temptation, arming ourselves with the word of God, and staying close to Jesus in the sacraments will ensure that we will share His victory over sin and one day reign with Him in heaven.