

Reflection for the 1st Sunday of Lent, Cycle C

The lectionary translation of the readings for this Sunday can be found at <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/030925.cfm>

1st Reading: *Deuteronomy 26:4–10*

The first reading is part of the religious instructions given to the Hebrew people after they were brought into the land. Instead of living in slavery to another, they now live off the produce of the land “flowing with milk and honey”. They are told to give a thanksgiving sacrifice, at harvest time, of the first fruits of the land as a reminder of that. This reading was probably chosen to show that we should recognize that all we have comes from God and belongs to him; and we should be thankful for his gifts.

2nd Reading: *Romans 10:8–13*

This selection comes from a section in Romans where Paul is talking about the place for Jews and Gentiles in the Church. The first sentence in the selection is pointing back to Moses’ final discourse in Deuteronomy. Where Deuteronomy is speaking of the written Law, Paul is speaking of faith in the author of the Law, Jesus, to whom it points. It is faith in Jesus that saves, not faith in the works of the Law.

Gospel: *Luke 4:1–13*

Filled with the holy Spirit, Jesus returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert for forty days, (to be) tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and when they were over he was hungry. The devil said to him... Lk 1-3a

Gospel Reflection

I grew up in a medium sized Ohio town, during a time when just about all Catholic kids went to Catholic school. On Ash Wednesday, the question everyone was asking was, ‘What did you give up for Lent?’ It seems to me that most Lents, I gave up chocolate. I did that because, as I understood Lent, it was a penitential observance and I really loved chocolate; I still do.

It is often said that the Lenten fast is reflective of Jesus’ forty days in the desert. But he didn’t need to do penance did he? What was his forty days all about? It is different in the three synoptic Gospels. Let’s look at that.

Eugene LaVerdiere points out that the forty days is symbolic of Jesus entire ministry in the world. His desert was the desert we all live in with the spiritual dangers we all face. He was here with us. Mathew presents the forty-day experience as if it is preparation for his public ministry, kind of a strengthening. Luke presents it as a spiritual communing with God. This could also be seen as preparation but not a preparation through testing, a preparation through communion with the Father. Note that immediately after the desert experience, Jesus begins his Galilean ministry “in the power of the Spirit.”

In Luke, the desert experience proceeds immediately from Jesus prayer time after his baptism. The Gospel separates the two by the discussion of Jesus’ genealogy. It is during the prayer time that the Holy Spirit descends upon him. Then filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus is led into the desert for forty days.

In Luke's Gospel, the Spirit accompanies Jesus throughout his desert experience and the listed temptations occur only after the forty days. Most ancient texts say that Jesus was pressured by the devil during those forty days. If you've ever had a difficult prayer time where you were constantly distracted, you know what that is all about. How did Jesus maintain his communion with God and resist the temptations?

It seems to me that it must have been because Jesus was "in the Spirit", as the Gospel says. It was his explicit connection to the Spirit that helped him. And, I suggest, that's what Lent should be for us too. It should be a time when we practice living every day explicitly open to the Spirit within us so that when Easter arrives, we can truly celebrate the new life that resurrection is. How do we do that?

It may mean distancing ourselves from the false Gods that we let guide us in this world. Thomas Aquinas said those substitutes for God are the quest for wealth, power, pleasure, and honor. There are probably more but notice that they are all self-serving. If we can distance ourselves from our desire to serve our own desires and truly focus on the other, then we can notice the presence of the Holy Spirit who is always present in relationship. Then, and I think only then, we can open ourselves to what we call the urgings of the Spirit and discover that our lives are enriched and the devil has no power over us.

By way of illustration... Try this, I've suggested it before, but really try it and see if it is not true. In some interaction with another, focus on the other. Resist preparing for what you are going to say. Focus on the deeper reality to which their words are pointing, their feelings and emotions, the person who is expressing themselves. You shouldn't be thinking about that. Don't think about anything. Just experience them and, if you do, you will experience the presence of another mysterious person. That's the Holy Spirit. Then you may respond from the feeling the Holy Spirit is helping you feel.

Don't give up chocolate this Lent. Let's give up our self-interested lifestyle. I guarantee that our lives will be enriched and we will really have something to celebrate this Easter.

God bless...

Personal Reflection:

Filled with the holy Spirit, Jesus returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert for forty days, (to be) tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and when they were over he was hungry. The devil said to him... Lk 1-3a

Question:

What words or phrases attracted your attention during the Liturgy of the Word on Sunday? What connection do those words or phrases have to your day-to-day life? (Why do you think they attracted your attention?) What might God be trying to say to you through these words or phrases? What response should you make? What action should you take?

Alternative:

Reflect upon/Share about some experience you've had, in your life, of being guided. Was it another person who guided you, wisdom you've learned during life, the Holy Spirit; from where did your guidance come? How valuable was that guidance, what did it do for you? What can you do to ensure that your guidance always comes from the promised Holy Spirit?

Verse by Verse:

Lk 4:1a&b: “Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus returned from the Jordan...” | This connects the following with Jesus’ baptism which was followed by Luke’s version of his genealogy. After his baptism, Jesus was praying, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him.

Lk 4:1c: “...was led by the Spirit into the desert...” | Most manuscripts read “was led in the spirit in the desert”. According to them, Luke indicates that the Spirit was with him in His desert experience. (The translation in our Lectionary exists in some manuscripts but, according to the AYBC, is probably a harmonization with Mark that Luke does not intend) There seems to be some discussion as to whether Luke means that Luke was subject to the spirit or freely followed the Spirit’s guidance.

By the “desert” the wilderness of Judea is meant, perhaps as place of contact with God (see Hos 2:14–15), but more so as an abode of wild beasts and demons (Lev 16:10; Isa 13:21; 34:14; Tob 8:3). This double aspect of the desert thus confronts Jesus. (AYBC)

Lk 4:2a: “for forty days...” | Scholars don’t seem to be confident that the 40 days points back to any particular occurrence in the Hebrew Scriptures, 40 years in the desert for the freed Israelites, 40 days on the mountain for Moses. The Gospel of Matthew says he fasted those forty days. Luke simply says he ate nothing during them. The 40 days seems to be talking about his fast.

Lk 4:2b: “...to be tempted by the devil.” | Our translation seems to say that the purpose of the desert experience was for Jesus to be tempted (tested). I couldn’t find support for this translation. NA26INT and the UBSH indicate that the proper translation should simply be “tempted by the devil” without that being the intentionality of the experience.

AYBC points out that tempted, here, doesn’t mean to test his faith but has the sinister intention of frustrating the plan of salvation. The NA26INT Greek literally reads “being pressured by the slanderer.”

The JBC states that the reason for the desert experience was to commune with the Father and the temptations only occur at the end of the experience. It seems to me possible to assume the devil may have been trying to disrupt Jesus prayerful communion and the temptations mentioned at the end are symbolic of all the devil’s efforts.

Lk 4:3 “If you are the son of God...” | Being a dutiful son of God implies that Jesus would do his father’s will. The devil challenges him, because of his hunger, to put his own will first. To step away from being the humble servant.

Lk 4:6b & 7b: “I shall give to you all this power and glory... if you worship me.” The devil now challenges Jesus to put himself (the devil) in the place of his father. AYBC notes that the devil is posing as the prince or god of this world. JBC notes that this is a temptation to become a political messiah rather than the type of messiah the Father wishes. Also we should note that the Jewish people expected a worldly messiah, a messiah king that would restore the Davidic kingdom.

Lk 4:8: “...*You shall worship the Lord, your God, and him alone shall you serve.*” | This quotation is from Dt 6:3. Jesus rejects the temptation to change his allegiance to the devil or to the things of this world.

Lk 4:9c “...If you are the son of God...” AYBC says that this is a temptation for Jesus to make his sonship about himself and demonstrate to his contemporaries that he is protected by God. It seems to me that it

could be a test of Jesus' faith in the Father. It reminds me of the ceremonies of the snake handler religions which I think could contain both elements.

Lk 4:12b "*...You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.*" | Jesus maintains right relationship with the Father.

Lk 4:13a "When the devil had finished every temptation..." | NA26INT says "Having completed fully all pressure..." This seems to mean that the three described temptations symbolize the totality of everything the devil had at his disposal to throw at Jesus. JBC says that it seems to mean that Jesus perfected himself through the temptations.

Lk 4:13b "The devil left him for a time" | Until his passion, when the devil causes others to perpetrate evil on Jesus; 22:3 "Then Satan entered into Judas.", 22:31-32 "Simon, Simon, behold Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat", and 22:53 "Day after day I was with you preaching in the temple area and you did not seize me, but this is your hour, the time for the power of darkness."