

vocation for each one of us. The enemy will do everything possible to distract us and thwart God's purpose. If we have heard God's voice welcoming us as his children, we will also hear the whispered suggestions of the enemy.

*Matthew for everyone* / Tom Wright. 2002, p.26

## 2

A silly idea is current that good people do not know what temptation means. This is an obvious lie. Only those who try to resist temptation know how strong it is... A man who gives in to temptation after five minutes simply does not know what it would have been like an hour later. That is why bad people, in one sense, know very little about badness. They have lived a sheltered life by always giving in.

*Mere Christianity* / C. S. Lewis. 1952

## Related topics

*For further study:*

Lent; conversion; sin (personal, social, systemic); grace; paschal mystery; repentance; preparation for baptism; prayer; fasting; almsgiving.

## Closing Prayer

Lord our God, in every age you call a people to hear your word and to do your will.

Renew us in these Lenten days:  
washed clean of sin, sealed with the Spirit,  
and sustained by your living bread,  
may we remain true to our calling and, with the elect, serve you alone.

Grant this through Christ, our liberator from sin,  
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
holy and mighty God for ever and ever.

*Opening prayers, Lent 1, Year A*<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Opening prayers : scripture-related collects for the years A, B and C from the sacramentary* / International Commission on English in the Liturgy. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 1999,

## 4

# The First Sunday of Lent

## Principal Service readings

Genesis 2.15-17; 3.1-7	The Fall
Psalms 32	Admission of sin
Romans 5.12-19	Adam and Jesus Christ
Matthew 4.1-11	Jesus is tempted in the desert

## Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,  
speak to our hearts in the stillness,  
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,  
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;  
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

## Gospel Reading

### *Jesus is tested*

<sup>1</sup>Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. <sup>2</sup>He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. <sup>3</sup>The tempter came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.' <sup>4</sup>But he answered, 'It is written,

“One does not live by bread alone,  
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

<sup>5</sup>Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, <sup>6</sup>saying to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written,

“He will command his angels concerning you”,  
and

“On their hands they will bear you up,  
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.”

<sup>7</sup>Jesus said to him, 'Again it is written, “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.”

<sup>8</sup>Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour; <sup>9</sup>and he said to him, 'All these I will

give you, if you will fall down and worship me.’<sup>10</sup> Jesus said to him, ‘Away with you, Satan! for it is written,

“Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.”

<sup>11</sup>Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

Matthew 4.1-11 NRSV<sup>1</sup>

## Comments and Questions

Jesus is led by the Spirit to a place of testing, the wilderness or desert. The concern of the passage is not so much whether Jesus is able to resist temptation as the portrayal of Jesus as the Son of God, ‘who has been tempted in every respect as we are, yet without sin’ (Hebrews 4.15). There versions of this passage in all three synoptic gospels (Mark 1.12-13; Luke 4.1-13). Mark’s version is very short, but Luke’s version is similar to Matthew’s. Both have three dialogues between the devil and Jesus. Jesus quotes three times from the Deuteronomy 6-8 (8.3; 6.16; 6.13). In those chapters Moses addresses the people of Israel towards the end of the time of wandering in the desert, and before they enter the promised land. The underlying theme of Deuteronomy is covenant.

Israel’s experience in the wilderness is expressed in terms of a test from God: “And you shall remember all the way which the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments, or not” (Deut 8:2). Besides the testing motif this verse contains several other themes developed in Matt 4:1-11: Israel’s being led by God, the number forty, the wilderness, and perhaps even the notion of fasting in the verb “humble” (*nh*).

Harrington (2007), p.69<sup>2</sup>

In the first test Jesus is tempted to show off. Will the Son of God fail the test like Israel did when it grumbled and asked for earthly food? But Jesus is clear that Israel might know the Word of God as the true source of life.

<sup>1</sup> *New Revised Standard Version Bible* is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

<sup>2</sup> *The Gospel of Matthew* / Daniel J. Harrington. – Rev. ed. – Collegeville, Minnesota : The Liturgical Press, 2007. – (Sacra pagina series ; 1). – 978-0-8146-5964-9

In the second test the devil quotes from Psalm 91 (Septuagint Psalm 90) about God’s protection:

For he shall give his angels charge over you,  
to keep you in all your ways.  
They shall bear you in their hands,  
lest you dash your foot against a stone.

Psalm 91.11-12 CW

The tempter suggests that Jesus should test the validity of the promise of divine protection. Jesus refuses to do what Israel did at Massah (see Exodus 17.1-7).

Thirdly, Jesus taken to a very high mountain from which all the kingdoms of the world can be viewed. The devil uses the word ‘homage’ (see also Matthew 2.2, 89, 11; 28.17). For Jesus to pay homage to the devil would involve a reversal of roles. ‘Go away, Satan’ Jesus says (4.10), using a phrase similar to one he will use in 16.23 that he says to Peter.

Jesus’ responses to the devil show what kind of Son of God he is. There is nothing left for the ‘tester’ to do, so he leaves, and angels come and minister to Jesus.

As we look at this passage at the beginning of Lent we can ask ourselves whether we are ready to resist temptation, what suggestions might tempt us, and how we are to resist. We should note that the devil also quotes scripture! In the opening chapters of Matthew, the focus of attention is on the identity of Jesus. Temptations, even those that make us feel awkward or embarrassed, are situations that Jesus understands and can help us to handle.

## Quotations

### 1

The temptations we all face, day by day and at critical moments of decision and vocation in our lives, may be very different from those of Jesus, but they have exactly the same point. They are not simply trying to entice us into committing this or that sin. They are trying to distract us, to turn us aside, from the path of servanthood to which our baptism has commissioned us. God has a costly but wonderfully glorious