

Fourteen weeks ago we began the liturgical year with what was then the new season of Advent, during which time we prepared, of course, for the coming of our savior, Jesus Christ, who was born on Christmas Day, which is at the end of Advent. Now we have *this* new season which started this past Wednesday, which is called, of course, Lent. And the very special day at the end of Lent is Easter. The feast of Easter is when we celebrate Jesus' raising from the dead to new life.

We're finally going to be shaking this cold weather we've been having, especially this past week. Did you know warm it is supposed to get today (Sunday)? Little by little it's going to get warmer. When it starts to get warm in the winter, that means the season which is coming, of course, is spring. Lots of changes take place during spring, but the most noticeable change is the warmth, which is why people, after a long cold winter, like spring so much.

So now let's turn our attention back to church. You will notice that the priest's vestments and altar covering are purple this week. Last week the prevailing color was green, the color in the church for Ordinary Time. But in Lent, the color is purple while Ordinary Time is put on hold until after the Easter season. The word LENT actually comes from the old English (Lencten) and Dutch (Lenten), words which mean lengthening day, which is what happens in spring. By the way, Daylight Savings Time, when the sun suddenly stays up an hour longer, starts next week. So Lent is the springtime of the Church.

With all that background, now it's time for the readings. A long time ago, thousands of years ago in fact, you may remember that Moses led the Jewish people out of Egypt where they were slaves for many years. Moses taught the people how to worship God in thanksgiving for rescuing them from Egypt and bringing them into the land of milk and honey, the promised land, Israel. Today's first reading comes from the Old Testament Book of Deuteronomy. (You know the Old Testament, the testament from the bible which takes place before Jesus was born.)

A reading from the Book of Deuteronomy (26:4-10).

Moses said to the people: “The priest will take the baskets of grain from your hands and put them in front of the Lord your God. And there, in the presence of the Lord your God, you must say, ‘My ancestor was merely a homeless Aramean, who went to live in Egypt. Although his family was small, they became great and powerful, a nation of many people. ‘The Egyptians showed no pity! They oppressed our people and were very cruel to us. Then we called out for help to You, the Lord God of our ancestors. You heard our cries and knew that we were in trouble, distressed and oppressed. ‘You reached out Your mighty arm and rescued us from slavery in Egypt. You did fearsome things, and You worked miracles and all kinds of wonders. ‘You brought us here and gave us this land rich in milk and honey. Now, Lord, I bring to You the best part of the crops that You have given to me.’ Then Moses said, “Leave your baskets there in the presence of the Lord your God, and bow down to worship him.” The Word of the Lord.

So, Moses is speaking to the Jewish people, the Israelites, whom God had rescued from Egypt, where they were slaves. Moses tells the Israelites, and us too, that we have to remind ourselves of God’s love, that He is always present (not just during Lent, by the way), and we need to tell God that this is what we believe. His love leads us out of our slavery to sin, to our land of milk and honey, not Israel, but Jesus’ kingdom of heaven.

Today’s Psalm, #91, is a prayer of *trust* in the protective love of God. (There is that word *trust* again, that we spoke about only three weeks ago. Remember, no matter how bad it gets here on earth, all you have to do is *trust* in God and your reward will be great in heaven.)

Psalm 91:1-2, 10-11

Be with me, Lord, when I am in trouble.

Be with me, Lord, when I am in trouble.

Live in the protection of God Most High and stay in the shadow of God All-Powerful. Then you will say to the Lord, “You are my fortress, my place of safety; You are my God, and I trust You.”

Be with me, Lord, when I am in trouble.

No terrible disasters will strike you or your home. God will command His angels to protect you wherever you go.

Be with me, Lord, when I am in trouble.

Isn't that a nice prayer to the Lord? “You are my fortress, my place of safety; You are my God, and I *trust* You.” It might be a good idea to remember this prayer and say it when you are sad or troubled. “You are my fortress, my place of safety; You are my God, and I *trust* You.” Remember that God is always there for you. All you have to do is call out to Him.

Now there is a simple message in the next reading from St. Paul. If we believe in our heart and say out loud that Jesus is Lord and that he was raised from the dead, then we will all be saved.

A reading from the letter of St. Paul to the Romans (10:8-13).

What does Scripture say? “The Word of God is near you. The word of faith is in your mouth and in your heart.” Because if you say with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, then you will be saved. Because Scripture also says. “No one who believes in Jesus will be put to shame.” The same Lord is Lord of all, helping everyone who calls

to Him for help. Everyone who calls to the Lord for help will be saved. The Word of the Lord.

Paul reminds us that holy scripture tells us about the word of God, that if we say out loud that Jesus is Lord and believe it in our hearts and believe that He was raised from the dead, then He will save us from the slavery of sin, the sin which traps us and blocks us from being one with God. But Moses reminds us and Paul tells us to *trust* that the Lord will lead us to freedom from that slavery.

Just eight short (very short) weeks ago you may remember when we spoke about Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River. His cousin, John the Baptist, baptized Him with water from the river. And then a dove appeared above Jesus' head and God's voice from heaven said, "You are my own dear son. I am pleased with You." So there were God, the Father, in the form of the voice, God, the Son, in the person of Jesus, and God, the Holy Spirit, in the form of the dove, altogether in one place. This is only one of two times in the bible that all three persons of God were visible in the same place. (Spoiler alert: the other time takes place in next week's gospel.)

Well, after His baptism Jesus chose to go to the desert, led there by the Holy Spirit. What kind of a place is the desert? The desert is a lonely place. Jesus wanted to be alone, to pray, to think, to talk to His father, God, and to listen to Him. Let *us* listen carefully as St. Luke tells us what happened.

Normally, we say the Alleluia verse before the gospel. However, during Lent we do not say Alleluia. Not until we celebrate the Lord's resurrection on Easter do we say Alleluia again in church.

Glory & praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ.

Glory & praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ.

No one lives on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.

Glory & praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ.

You should notice when you are at Mass that the gospel reader, as he announces the reading of the gospel, will trace the sign of the cross on his forehead, lips, and heart. And as you respond “Glory to you, O Lord,” you too should make the same tracing of the cross on *your* forehead, lips, and heart.

A reading from the holy gospel according to St. Luke (4:1-13).

When Jesus returned from the Jordan River, the power of the Holy Spirit was with Him, and the Spirit led Him into the desert. For forty days Jesus was tested by the devil, and during that time He went without eating. When it was all over, He was hungry. The devil said to Jesus, “If you are God’s Son, tell this stone to turn into bread.” Jesus answered, “The Scriptures say, ‘No one can live on bread alone.’” Then the devil led Jesus up to a high place and quickly showed him all the nations on earth. The devil said, “I will give all this power and glory to you. It has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. Just worship me, and you can have it all.” (Pause very briefly.) And what do you think? Did Jesus worship the devil?—Of course not. Let’s keep listening. So in response to the devil, this time... Jesus said, “The Scriptures say, ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve only Him.’” Finally, the devil took Jesus to Jerusalem and had Him stand on top of the temple. The devil said, “If You are God’s Son, jump off. The Scriptures say, ‘God will tell His angels to take care of You. They will catch You in their arms, and You will not hurt Your feet on the stones.’” Jesus answered, “The Scriptures also say, ‘Don’t try to test the Lord your God!’” After the devil had finished testing Jesus in every way possible, he left Him, for a while. The gospel of the Lord.

So, Jesus was in the desert for forty days. And that's why Lent is forty days long. In fact, the words for Lent in Latin (Quadragesimae), Italian (Quaresima), Spanish (Cuaresma), Portuguese (Quaresma), and French (Careme) all refer to forty days. And what Jesus did while he was in the desert for forty days was not eat anything, that is, He fasted. He gave up eating. This is why many people give up something for Lent. Jesus also prayed during those forty days. We said He went into the desert to be alone, to pray to God, to talk to God, to listen to God, to be closer to God. This is also what we can do during Lent. So just like Jesus did during His forty days in the desert, and *this is important girls and boys*, during Lent we should consider giving up something and doing something special to be closer to God.

After Jesus spent those forty days in the desert, what the *devil* did was tempt Jesus, like he tempts all of us (cookies before dinner, cheat during Lent, skip saying prayers, etc.). Instead of giving in to each temptation, instead of going over to the devil, Jesus quoted holy scripture. "No one can live on bread alone." "Worship the Lord your God and serve only Him." And "Don't try to test the Lord your God!" One would think that Jesus—remember that He was a man—felt pretty hungry after forty days without eating. And he certainly would have liked to have some bread. But instead of falling for the devil's temptations, he told the devil that the word of God feeds our minds and hearts, which is more important nourishment than simple bread. Because God's word will save us.

Now watch how this all comes together. Moses reminded the Israelites how God saved them from the Egyptians. Paul tells us how the Lord saves us from sin. And Jesus showed us how the word of God, more important than eating itself, can protect us even from the devil himself. The Egyptians, sin, the devil, God is always there for us. Which is why we say, "Be with me, Lord, when I am in trouble." And He always is.

And that, girls and boys, is the lesson in today's readings.

First Sunday of Lent, 2022
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