

LENT I SUNDAY: DEUT: 26: 4-10, ROMANS 10:8-13, LUKE 4: 1-13

Lent begins with a reflection on the Temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. *Forty days of fasting and prayer*. The phrase "forty days" was the Hebrew way of expressing a long period of time. We find it used in the recounting of various incidents in Jewish history and it has a scriptural significance: a) forty days of rain in Noah's time, b) forty days which Moses spent on the mountain with God (Ex. 34:28), c) forty days during which the prophet Elijah traveled in the wilderness (II Kg. 19:8). *The wilderness* was probably a desert in Judea, perhaps the great deserts of Horeb or Sinai, where the children of Israel were tried for forty years, and where Moses and Elijah fasted forty days.

Each of the three temptations, according to the Fathers of the Church, represents an area in which humans regularly fail: the lust of the flesh (stones to bread), the lust of the eye and the heart (ruling over all kingdoms), and the pride of life (a spectacular leap from the Temple). Note that Jesus overcame these temptations through the knowledge of his identity, his purpose, and God's plan for human salvation.

The temptations to turn stones into bread, to worship Satan and to leap from the pinnacle of the Temple demonstrate three aspects of self-control: material, civil and spiritual. Likewise, they correspond with three levels of human blessings: 1) those who have material goods, 2) those who have political power and 3) those who have spiritual powers. These, in turn, correspond to three human seductions: 1) If you will worship me, I will make you rich; 2) If you will worship me, I will give you political power; 3) If you will worship me, I will endow you with magical power. Jesus dismisses the temptations by references to Deuteronomy. "*One does not live by bread alone*" (8:3); "*Worship the Lord your God*" (6:13), and "*Do not put the Lord your God to the test*" (6:16). Jesus used two powerful weapons against the temptations: the Holy Spirit and Holy Scripture. Jesus was "full of the Holy Spirit," and the Spirit helped him to survive his temptations (Lk. 4:1, 4:14, 4:18). Likewise, he quoted Holy Scripture in response to all three temptations.

We need to confront and conquer temptations as Jesus did, using the means he employed: Like Jesus, every one of us is tempted to sinful pleasures, easy wealth and positions of authority, and is drawn to the use of unjust or sinful means to attain good ends. Jesus sets a model for conquering temptations through prayer, penance and the effective use of the "word of God." Temptations make us true warriors of God by strengthening our minds and hearts. We are never tempted beyond our power. In his first letter, St. John assures us: "*Greater is He who is in us, than the power of the world*". Hence during Lent, let us confront our evil tendencies by prayer (especially by participating in the Holy Mass), by penance and by meditative reading of the Bible. Knowledge of the Bible prepares us for the moment of temptation by enabling us "to know Jesus more clearly, to love him more dearly and to follow him more nearly, day by day," as William Barclay puts it.