

First Sunday of Lent



Lent begins with Ash Wednesday this week, inviting us into a 40-day spiritual retreat into the desert. This aligns with Jesus Christ's journey immediately following his baptism in the Jordan River where his identity as God's beloved son is proclaimed. During this season of renewal and cleansing, we seek to be strengthened in virtue by shedding the things that keep us from knowing, loving, and serving God.

This Sunday's Gospel Reading sheds light on Jesus' temptation by Satan in the desert after fasting for 40 days. Bishop Fulton Sheen reflects on this passage and the nature of temptation by noting, "The defenses of the soul are seen at their strongest when the evil which has been resisted is also strong. The presence of temptation does not necessarily imply moral imperfection on the part of the one who is tempted." This is true for all of us recovering from lust addiction, sexual compulsions, and unhealthy attachments.

Addiction takes hold in our lives as we believe the lie that something other than our Lord can bring us to fulfillment. What may begin as a pleasurable experience results in a mental obsession and physical cravings which we cannot relinquish on our own. By God's grace, we have encountered a solution and a fellowship of men who have found freedom from this cycle of addiction and spiritual darkness. We can seek Jesus as our guide who knows the real human forces of temptation. Luke's Gospel notes:

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.

As seen in this Sunday's Gospel Reading, our temptations can be categorized in three ways:

- those of the flesh (lust and gluttony)
- those of the mind (pride and envy)
- loving and pursuing other idols (greed)

In recovery, we must be careful to avoid the allure of power, honor, and the pursuit of other false idols:

Then he took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a single instant. The devil said to him, "I shall give to you all this power and glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I may give it to whomever I wish. All this will be yours, if you worship me." Jesus said to him in reply, "It is written: You shall worship the Lord, your God, and him alone shall you serve."

Many 12-step principles are woven into the story of Christ's temptation in the desert and we can learn much about surrender in the most challenging moments of our recovery. For Jesus, the gesture of turning his will and life over to the care of God is not a one-time act. Rather, it is full of daily and momentary choices. Love and commitment are affirmed through these choices. When we were active in our addictions and driven by lust, we had no choices and we were not free.

Through our baptism, we are given an identity as beloved sons of God. As we step further into our recovery, we have opportunities to learn what that means to us as faithful Catholics. The devil—also known as *the father of lies*—would have us believe that we can inherit the glory of the world and may only find it through the empty addictive behavior we once knew.

Remember that we deal with the forces of evil—cunning, baffling, powerful, and patient. We need God's help each day. We commit ourselves to our Creator and to our recovery throughout these 40 days despite whatever temptations may come. Remember, you are not alone. May we find resolve and strength in the Lord during this season of Lent!

Reflection Questions

- How has God transformed you, protected you, and guided you in the midst of temptation?
- What challenges and temptations related to recovery do you need to invite God and the help of others into today?
- How do you plan to seek renewal and spiritual progress during this season of Lent?

Catholic in Recovery Lenten Reflection Book

A compilation of many CIR members' experience, strength, and hope to accompany you through Lent

- A new seasonal e-book will feature reflections rooted in daily scripture readings and recovery principles
- Daily reflection gatherings will be available via Zoom every day of Lent
- CIR Lenten Reflection Book will be delivered free to Advocate's Circle members or available for purchase for \$5 at catholicinrecovery.com/store

Sunday Mass Readings this Week

1st Reading: Deuteronomy 26:4-10

Responsorial Psalm: Ps 91:1-2, 10-11, 12-13, 14-15

2nd Reading: Romans 10:8-13

Gospel: Luke 4:1-13