

Lent begins by drawing us into a quieter, more honest place. It asks us to slow down, strip away distractions, and pay attention to what has been driving us beneath the surface. For those in recovery, this invitation feels familiar. We know what it means to reach a point where our old ways no longer work and where surrender becomes the only path forward. Lent does not ask us to perform or impress. It asks us to tell the truth and trust God with what we find.

This Sunday's gospel reading brings us into the desert with Jesus. Before any public ministry begins, Jesus is led by the Spirit into a place of testing, hunger, and vulnerability. The desert is not a punishment. It is a place where identity is clarified and trust is deepened.

This Sunday's gospel reading tells us what unfolds at the beginning of Jesus' public life (Matthew 4:1-2):

*At that time Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was hungry.*

Jesus enters fully into the human experience of temptation. He knows what it means to feel hunger, weakness, and pressure to seek relief outside of God's will. This matters deeply for those of us in recovery. Addiction often took hold when we believed the lie that something other than God could bring us comfort, control, or fulfillment. What may have begun as relief or pleasure eventually became obsession and compulsion, leaving us powerless to stop on our own.

In the desert, Jesus is tempted to satisfy legitimate needs in illegitimate ways. Each temptation invites him to grasp, control, or prove something about himself. Each time,

Jesus responds not with force, but with trust. He remains rooted in his identity as Son and refuses to abandon his dependence on the Father. This is not a one-time act of surrender. It is a series of moment-by-moment choices grounded in obedience and love.

Recovery mirrors this pattern. Turning our will and our lives over to the care of God is not something we do once and then move past. It is a daily practice, often renewed in moments of discomfort, craving, or fear. When we were active in addiction, our choices were driven by compulsion rather than freedom. Recovery restores the ability to pause, ask for help, and choose differently, even when it costs us something.

The first reading reinforces the importance of this freedom. God sets before us life and death, blessing and curse, and invites us to choose wisely. Love of God is not forced. It is freely given and freely renewed. Lent places this choice before us again, not to shame us, but to reorient our hearts.

Through baptism, we have been given a new identity as beloved sons and daughters of God. Lent prepares the Church to welcome new members through the sacraments of initiation, while inviting those already baptized to renew their commitment to that identity. Ash Wednesday marks this beginning with humility. The ashes remind us that we are not self-sufficient and never were.

When we hear the words, "Repent and believe in the Gospel," we are invited back to the basics. Prayer, fasting, and almsgiving are not spiritual achievements. They are simple, concrete ways of trusting God, cleaning house,

and turning our attention outward. Lent does not require dramatic gestures. It asks for honest ones.

As we walk through this season together, we do not do so alone. The desert becomes a place of grace when we allow God to meet us in our weakness. Day by day, choice by choice, Lent invites us to practice surrender and rediscover the freedom that comes from living one day at a time with God.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What does the desert represent in your recovery right now, and how are you being invited to meet God there?
- Where do you notice temptation pulling you toward old patterns of control or escape, and what helps you pause and surrender?
- How might prayer, fasting, or almsgiving support your recovery in simple, realistic ways this Lent?

## MASS READINGS

**FIRST READING** Genesis 2:7-9; 3:1-7

**RESP. PS.** Psalm 51:3-4, 5-6, 12-13, 17

**SECOND READING** Romans 5:12-19

**GOSPEL** Matthew 4:1-11

