

Lent begins by drawing us into the desert, a place where noise fades and deeper truths surface. For adult children of dysfunctional homes, this invitation can stir both longing and anxiety. Many of us learned early how to scan a room, anticipate conflict, and adapt quickly to maintain stability. We survived by staying alert and by minimizing our own needs. Recovery invites us to slow down and notice what is happening inside rather than managing what is happening around us.

This Sunday's gospel reading brings us into the desert with Jesus at the start of his public ministry (Matthew 4:1-4):

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. The tempter approached and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become loaves of bread." He said in reply, "It is written: One does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes forth from the mouth of God."

Jesus allows himself to experience hunger and vulnerability. He does not rush to eliminate discomfort or prove his strength. For many adult children, this can feel unfamiliar. We may have learned that vulnerability was unsafe, that needs were inconvenient, or that weakness would be exploited. As a result, we developed survival roles that helped us endure but now restrict our freedom.

The temptations Jesus faces are subtle. He is invited to prove himself and to secure control in a moment of weakness. These invitations echo the internal messages many of us carry: be perfect, do not need anyone, handle it yourself. In recovery, we begin to recognize how

these messages continue to shape our choices. We may overwork, overcommit, or withdraw emotionally in order to avoid feeling exposed.

The first reading reminds us that God places before us a choice between life and death. For adult children, this choice often appears in small, interior decisions. Will we choose honesty over people-pleasing? Rest over overfunctioning? Connection over isolation? These choices can feel risky, especially when old patterns once guaranteed safety. Yet Lent invites us to trust that a new way is possible.

Spiritual practices support this relearning. Prayer creates space to notice our feelings without immediately judging them. Fasting can reveal where we numb or distract from discomfort rather than face it. Almsgiving encourages generosity and connection, countering the isolation that often marked our early experiences. These practices are not about proving devotion. They are about cultivating trust.

Ash Wednesday grounds this season in humility. When we hear, "Remember that you are dust," we are reminded that we do not have to hold everything together. When we hear, "Repent and believe in the Gospel," we are invited to turn from old survival strategies and toward a God who meets us in our weakness.

Healing from dysfunctional family patterns is gradual. The desert does not resolve every wound at once. Yet as we walk with Jesus this Lent, we begin to experience a different kind of security. By remaining rooted in our identity as beloved sons and daughters of God, we discover

that we no longer have to prove ourselves or manage every outcome. In that trust, freedom slowly grows.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What survival patterns feel most active for you as Lent begins?

- How does Jesus' willingness to remain vulnerable challenge the way you handle discomfort?

- What small choice toward honesty or rest might God be inviting you to make this season?

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

