

Lent begins by leading us into the desert, a place where distractions are stripped away and hunger becomes impossible to ignore. For those recovering from lust addiction, this season can feel deeply personal. We know what it is like to experience desire that feels urgent, persistent, and difficult to manage. Lent does not deny that reality. Instead, it invites us to bring our hunger into the light and learn how to live with it differently.

This Sunday's gospel reading brings us into the desert with Jesus at the very beginning 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 does not avoid hunger. He experiences it fully. What he refuses to do is let hunger determine his identity or dictate his response. This distinction is essential in recovery. Lust addiction often convinces us that desire must be acted upon or suppressed immediately. We may have believed that relief was the same as healing, and that satisfying a craving would quiet it for good. Instead, acting on distorted desire often intensified shame and isolation.

In the desert, Jesus is tempted to meet a legitimate need through an illegitimate shortcut. Bread itself is not wrong. Hunger is not sinful. The temptation lies in separating the need from trust in the Father. In recovery, we begin

to recognize that desire itself is not the enemy. We were created with the capacity for intimacy, connection, and longing. The struggle arises when we attempt to meet those needs apart from God and apart from a healthy union.

Step One asks us to admit that we are powerless over compulsive behaviors and the distorted thinking that fuels them. That admission can feel humiliating, especially when lust has thrived in secrecy. Yet the desert shows us that weakness is not disqualifying. Jesus enters weakness without shame. He meets temptation with truth and dependence rather than denial.

The first reading reminds us that God sets before us life and death and invites us to choose. In moments of temptation, that choice may appear small and ordinary. It may be the decision to pause, to turn off a device, to reach out to a sponsor, or to pray honestly about what we are feeling. These are not dramatic gestures, but they are acts of trust that strengthen freedom over time.

Lent gives us concrete tools for this work. Fasting teaches us that we can experience desire without immediately satisfying it. Prayer roots us in our identity as beloved sons of God rather than as men defined by struggle. Almsgiving shifts our focus outward and reminds us that love grows when it is offered selflessly. These practices are not punishments for desire. They are ways of retraining our hearts.

When we hear on Ash Wednesday, "Repent and believe in the Gospel," we are invited to believe that change is possible. Sobriety is not merely about abstaining from certain behaviors. It is about learning to live with integrity,

to face hunger honestly, and to trust that God is enough. As we walk with Jesus through the desert this Lent, we discover that temptation does not have the final word. Grace does.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

■ What kinds of hunger or desire feel most present for you right now?

■ How does Jesus' response to temptation reshape the way you understand craving and identity?

■ What concrete Lenten practice could support greater honesty and freedom in your recovery 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

