

First Sunday of Lent



The readings for this Sunday's Mass—the First Sunday of Lent—remind us of the grace that floods our lives when we surrender our old ways and seek to be led by Jesus. Over the course of 40 days, Jesus takes us into the desert to proclaim or renew our obedience to Him. Three pillars of Lent that draw us closer to Christ are fasting, almsgiving, and prayer.

We might suffer a little bit during this process, but we can be affirmed that the voluntary suffering of the cross is far more redemptive than the self-centered suffering of addiction and unhealthy attachments. We journey together so that in our weakness we may find unity and in unity, victory. Aligning ourselves with the suffering of our Lord and the needs of our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ rededicates our commitment to recovery and a spiritual way of life.

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 with others who have found freedom from the cycle of addiction and spiritual darkness.

We can seek Jesus as our guide who knows the real human forces of temptation, as described in beginning of this Sunday's Gospel Reading:

*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.*

Many 12-step principles are woven into the story of Jesus' 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 is affirmed through these choices. When we were active in our addictions, compulsions, and unhealthy attachments, we had no choice and did not know freedom.

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Through our baptism, we are given an identity as beloved daughters and sons of God. As we step further into our recovery, we are given opportunities to decide 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.

The coming weeks prepare the way for new Christians to enter the Church through baptism. Those who have already received baptism are called to renew their vows and accompany the faithful celebrating the sacraments of initiation. This movement begins on Ash Wednesday, as the ashes we receive are a reminder of the humility required for a personal encounter with Jesus.

“Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return,” are words that may be spoken as ashes are put on our forehead. In other cases, we may hear the words of Jesus: “Repent and believe in the Gospel.”

The season of Lent is an opportune time to get back to basics and reestablish spiritual practices such as prayer, fasting, and sharing our resources. Basically, this is a chance to trust God, clean house, and help others. It doesn't have to be over-the-top. As Saint Mother Theresa once said, “Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love.”

- What challenges and temptations are you seeking to overcome by participating in 12-step recovery?
- How has God transformed your life in ways that you have not been able to yourself?
- What plans do you have connect with others to seek renewal and spiritual progress during this season of Lent?

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First Reading: Genesis 2:7-9, 3:1-7

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 51:3-4, 5-6, 12-13, 17

Second Reading: Romans 5:12-19

Gospel: Matthew 4:1-11