

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent (C)

6<sup>th</sup> March 2022

'Overcoming temptations with Jesus'

Dt 26: *the Lord brought us out of Egypt ...* Ps 90: *upon you no evil shall fall ...*

Rom 10: *if your lips confess that Jesus is Lord*

Lk 4: 1–13: *the Temptations in the wilderness*

To go somewhere absolutely new must be a daunting experience. Whether one is the first man on the moon like Neil Armstrong, or the first person at the South Pole like Roald Amundsen, or the first up Everest like Edmund Hilary — to go where no-one else has ever gone is frightening in itself. Is it possible? Will I come out of this alive? Perhaps Jesus entered the desert for 40 days with trepidation too: 40 days of fasting and prayer, suffering the human temptations that the devil laid in His path. Would He survive this new venture into the wilderness, to face the challenges of faithfulness to the Father's mission? Would He turn back, take the easy path, the devil's tempting words to manifest His divine power and lord it over creation?

Our Lent is entered into in imitation of Jesus's 40 days ... our Lent, too, is a time of fasting and prayer, to re-commit ourselves to faithfulness to God and to the

eliminating of sin in our lives. We fast to overcome our tendency to be greedy; we pray to overcome our tendency to be proud and self-sufficient; we give away to overcome our tendency to hoard and show reliance on possessions. But when we enter the desert of Lent — this time to be distracted less from our need for God and our duty to be holy — there is one enormous difference. We are not going somewhere no-one else has been. We are not entering this wilderness either for the first time, or alone. We are not trying to face the devil and his temptations with our own resources. We are entering the desert for 40 days where Christ has already been, and again now with Him. Jesus has already overcome the devil and the sin and death he brings. So we should enter with far less trepidation, far less fear. Lent is not fear of the unknown as we try and be with God more, and with our sins less. Our fasting, prayer, and giving, is done with Jesus, not done on our own. We can face and overcome our sins, too, not on our own, but in companionship with the Lord. He has been there already, and He is happy to go back there with us.

Let's look more carefully at the temptations that Jesus endures:

1. The first is the temptation to give in to GLUTTONY, simply to create food for Himself to satisfy his bodily cravings. We can associate this temptation with the tendency in our own society to overeating, overspending, drinking too much, risking our health through our lifestyle ... and also in ignoring the desperate needs of our hungry brothers and sisters, our poor neighbours, worldwide ... Jesus says to that, *Man does not live on bread alone*. The antidote to gluttony is the first way in which we keep Lent in the Church, that is, FASTING, 'giving something up.' It is good to give something up, to show that we are not reliant on those things to make us happy ... they are not the be-all and end-all of life. What the earth provides for us as food and drink is a gift from God, and when we choose to fast from something we acknowledge that gift in our life, and we honour the Giver as so much greater than the gift. All sorts of practical opportunities for giving-something-up are available to us (see [Lent Ideas 2022 sheet](#), with

newsletter). The thing to do for fasting in Lent is to be creative — not necessarily to fall back on the 'same old things' to give up, especially if those things are not honestly a huge challenge to you. For one, not to drink alcohol for the whole duration of Lent could be a huge thing; for another something that barely takes much effort. Maybe it's a fast from social media, YouTube videos, or Netflix, that is more the sort of challenge that Lent demands.

2. The second temptation that Jesus undergoes, as he's shown the glory of worldly kingdoms, is that of seeking PRESTIGE: rating possessions, property, achievements, above what really matters; i.e. above God and above our neighbour. It often leads to jealousies, tensions and feuds over money and property and inheritance; it tends to lead to over-work, the ignoring of our loving duty of worship for God (and the keeping of a properly Christian Sunday); it can draw us to the pursuit of 'getting and spending' as life's purpose. Jesus says to that, *You must worship the Lord your God, and serve Him alone*. The antidote to such

a chase for prestige, surely, is ALMSGIVING, giving away some of what we earn and own, freely and in charity: showing that we are not dominated by our keeping the wealth all to ourselves, but are determined to use it for the good of others. Again, there are so many ways (listed in the [sheet](#)) of very practical ways of giving alms. You may have your favourite charities, including the support of charities with which we already volunteer from Newman House, but as well as CaFOD, our own Catholic charity for overseas development, at this time I would emphasize the ‘gofundme’ collection that is being arranged for humanitarian aid in the Ukraine (QR code around Newman House).



3. And the third temptation of Christ in the desert was perhaps the cruellest: the temptation to *abandon* Himself humanly. One might associate this with that insidious temptation for us to DESPAIR, to abandon the search for value in one’s life, to destroy life, belittle others, ‘jack it all in’ as it were, and — all too common today — to be

depressed by the life we seem to be offered by the world, which from a secular perspective has no purpose. The antidote to despair, surely, is not more and more activity, but indeed the silence of PRAYER; the silent abandonment not to despair, but to God. This is not a negative abandonment, but a quiet trusting that He hears and answers, without any desperation on our part ... a simple quiet placing of ourselves in God’s loving presence, for His quiet care and support. Again, we can each make practical steps towards this, placing ourselves with quiet confidence before God in prayerful trust; that He will raise up our spirits. We need both to build up our communal prayer — which is an expression that whatever each one of us is experiencing in our life at this time, for better or worse, we are *together* praying for God’s grace and tender care — and we need to build up also our private prayer. Community prayer and private prayer go hand in hand, they are complementary dimensions of our prayer life; we need both. Prayer *is* our relationship with God, as individual believers and as the Church’s body united, and

it is that relationship of love that alone gives our lives meaning, and takes away our despair.

So many possibilities for the deepening of our prayer life in the next 6 weeks offer themselves; don't try and do all of them at once, or take on so many extras that by week 2 you've given up on them all! The [sheet of Lent Ideas](#) lists some things we offer here — especially extra times of prayer, and the weekend Worth retreat — but then there are all sorts of Jesuit prayer apps and simple personal offerings of quiet time with Jesus that you can make as your Lenten gift to the Lord.

So: let us go humbly, but confidently into the Lenten desert, knowing that when we offer Jesus our sacrifices of some fasting, prayer, and almsgiving, He will most certainly use those heavenly gifts to conquer in us the worldly temptations to gluttony, prestige, and despair. And that's why Lent needn't be a sombre time, but can be time of gentle joy too.