

1st Sunday Lent (A)

22nd February 2026

'Falling into sin; raised up by Lent'

Gen 2; 3: the Fall
more ...

Rom 5: *where sin increased, grace abounded all the more* ...
Mt 4: 1–11: the Temptations in the desert

Let's be frank: in Lent what we have get to grips with is sin. We have to tackle head-on the tricky question of sin; not to sweep the matter aside; but to decide on a soul-searching regarding our sins; to make a real move towards forgiveness, which means Confession.

As Popes have often reminded us, there is in society *a lack of the sense of sin*: a move towards explaining all our wrongdoing away, usually inventing some 'gene' or other that pre-disposes us to this ill or that ill. But this is not what we are taught by God. Scripture, as we heard in the 1st Reading is quite explicit about sin. Genesis recounts the Fall, which is the real truth about sin. *Mankind was not made for sin*, but for perfect union and harmony with God. But at the beginning of his history he fell into sin: mankind made some deliberate decision in pride, not to obey the command of God, but to be tempted into setting himself up against God, to place his will

against the wise Will of God. The consequences of the Fall are evident in the account from *Genesis*: (i) the rupture in man's relationship with God (hiding from Him); (ii) then the disharmony also with others ("but it was her!"); and (iii) the immediate warping of our sexual capacities, something innocent and of great beauty suddenly becoming something of shame ("they knew they were naked" and they covered themselves up). We don't need to study the news reports for very long — or even to reflect on our lives for long — to see today the presence of sin around us. Those same consequences are at work: the neglect and blasphemy of our creator, and the neglect and abuse of other people. However great or little our own sins may be, there is always a need for conversion to a purer life.

And the remedy is waiting for us. What happened in that garden of paradise — when man had all he needed for his happiness, and yet chose disobedience and pride instead — was undone in the wilderness by Jesus. When the devil tempted Adam & Eve, they fell; when the devil tempted Jesus, He stood firm. And if He stood firm, then

so can we: not on our own, but with Him. In the ‘Passion of the Christ’ film, you might remember, quite near the beginning in the Garden of Gethsemane, *Jesus stamps on the serpent!* This is not just an artistic device, but to demonstrate that victory. Only with Him can we conquer our sins. Only going with Him trustingly into the 40 Days of Lent can we ‘get to grips with sin.’

The devil is, as we should well know, the ‘father of lies.’ He deliberately sows untruths in order to trick and trap us, and it’s why we should have an abhorrence of lying, since it sows the seeds of disunity, deceit, mistrust, misery. We must see through the lies of the evil one, as Jesus did, if we are to do well in the Lenten desert, and come out into the light of Easter as better, nicer, kinder, more-loving, holier, people. The lies of the evil one — the temptations this life offers us — are blatant, and yet we often let ourselves be duped, and fall for them. Take Adam & Eve in the Garden of Eden: what were they thinking? The devil utters the most grotesque lie to them that, if they disobey God — imaged as the eating from the Tree of

which they were forbidden to eat — “*your eyes will be opened and you will be like God.*” How could that ever have been true? We are not God; we are His creatures; we will never be ‘like Him’ in that sense of being His equal, arbiters of good & evil. No — we are subject to Him, to His laws and His command, if we are to be happy. The ‘father of lies’ sows disruption in that happy relationship, envious of God’s sovereignty. There is a stupidity to his grasping and his lies, and yet, sometimes, when not holding firm in faith we can be even more stupid, believing those lies and ending up getting really hurt.

How do we see Our Lord dealing with the devil in His 40 Days’ fast? Well, first we see Him having no truck with the devil’s stupid, gross lies. At each turn, when the devil proffers the temptation, Our Lord rebuts Him with the Word of God, Scriptural quotations that are, of course, His own Word: “*Every word that comes from the mouth of God.*” He responds in the sacred tradition of the People of God, taught as they have been, by God, to reject the insidious tugging of ourselves’ baser passions. The devil

appeals to man's *greed*, with the temptation to Jesus to miraculously produce bread; he appeals to man's being *prone to despair*, to throw away one's life, with the temptation to hurl Himself from the Temple parapet; he appeals to man's desire for *prestige and power*, with the offer of all the kingdoms that are, he says (lie upon lie!) all his own to give. At each juncture, Our Lord — though hungry, though indeed humanly weak through the long fast in the wilderness, though divinely able to call on legions of holy angels to come to His aid — taught us that rejection of the devil's lies and temptations is within our capability, when we follow His lead through the challenges of the wilderness. In a way, our 6½ wks of Lent are a microcosm of an earthly life: Jesus teaches us how to get through it, unscathed by the devil's wiles, and instead heirs to the glory of holiness that comes only from God. Hence, the devotions of Lent are also practices that we can use the year round, all life long — they're not only for one eighth of the year; they can be for the whole year.

Fasting, this is the best antidote to greed, isn't it? Practising self-denial, restraint, when it comes to our intake

— food, drink, or other pleasures. What are we giving up, this Lent? It would be a fascinating thing to go round this congregation today, one by one, and hear your ideas. It would probably be edifying, very encouraging, as between you I'm sure you've all sorts of innovative ways of tackling those things that can be your addictions or your crutches. "Man does not live on bread alone" — nor on the internet alone! — "but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." Yes, fasting, 'giving something up,' should remain a big part of our sacrifice in Lent, given to God. So, what are you giving up, then? What's the one thing that's most important for you to give up this Lent? ... Do that!

Prayer is the most obvious antidote to despondency, or a tendency to despair, or lack in trust. When we are finding things hard, when things are getting us down, prayer might not always come easily, but in fact it's all the more valuable the place to go, to re-settle our soul. Giving to God a greater offering of prayer time is a sure way of making Lent a real 'sacrifice of praise,' a bulwark against the central sadness of secularism, that gross lie of the devil that life is without meaning. For you, then, what is the way you're

going to live up to a greater effort at praying, this Lent? An extra weekday Mass, perhaps? A generous time spent in Adoration? Finding a spiritual book to gradually read through in Lent? The Stations of the Cross? There are as many answers to that as there are of you: find the gift of prayer that works best for *you* to give God this season, but don't neglect finding something. Our prayer is the 'ballast in the boat,' it keeps our boat from capsizing, even in the buffeting waves of life, keeps it steady enough, upright and on course. Keep the prayer in there, every day!

Almsgiving, finally, is the antidote to our egotistical tendencies to prestige and petty power play. Our Lord Himself took a humble approach to this earthly life, whilst He could truly and rightly have claimed His kingship as Lord of this world. We are in no position to make claims to prestige, are we, when Our Lord did just the opposite, and "gave His life as a ransom for many"? Giving away some of our time and money to others, thoughtfully, generously, will always be a key element of the Christian life: to put others interests', particularly those of the needy, before our own. Almsgiving is a practice that we should learn when young, so that we will

naturally support good causes and charities once we have a salary. Many of our Christian brethren adopt the tradition of *tithing* — giving away 10% of their net income — and whilst each person, even when a poor student, must make their own conscientious decision about the appropriate level of almsgiving, yet the fact that we should give charitably is beyond question. That can be the precious gift of time, too: offering as many NH students already do, for example, time to feed the homeless through our own SVP 'pasta run,' or projects run at local parishes: St Patrick's, *Notre Dame de France*, Spanish Place. Personally I always make sure to give an extra donation, come the end of Lent, from a charities account that I keep topped up through the year. However we work it, let's make sure that the Lord's call to almsgiving isn't the part of our Lenten discipline that goes unheeded.

St Paul sums up, in his neat way, the Fall in Eden and the Rising-up in Christ when he says, as we heard, "For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous." Let's allow Jesus, 'Victor in the Wilderness,' to teach us His saving obedience this Lent.