

Pastoral Letter – First Sunday of Lent 2026

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

On this first Sunday of Lent, we find Jesus at the start of his ministry being led into the desert by the Holy Spirit. He has just returned from the Jordan, where he was baptised by John. His baptism, it would seem, is the start of his troubles.

We may think that our baptism can put paid to our temptations, but in point of fact, it appears to rouse them, or at least exacerbate them. And why not? If the devil is prowling round like a lion seeking the ruin of souls, then surely it is the baptised he would have in his sights. After all, armed with our baptism we present a real and present danger to him. We are commissioned to serve the Lord's battle plans in this world, and so to ambush us would give him tactical advantage. He didn't want Jesus to prevail, he doesn't want us to prevail. So, he lies in wait ready to pounce, especially when he knows we are vulnerable.

In today's gospel reading we have the devil trying to ambush Jesus from fulfilling his mission with three temptations. We all face these temptations and Jesus' responses have much to teach us.

The first temptation is a basic and universal one: it is presented as being about food, turning stones into bread, but what might this signify? The devil is tempting Jesus to use his divine power for himself, to satisfy his physical and material needs first and not the will of His Heavenly Father.

We all face the temptation to treat the satisfaction of our bodily appetites as our number one aim and priority. The devil knows this and if he can get Jesus to adopt such priorities then he has won. How likely is it that Jesus will subject himself to crucifixion for our sins if his own physical well-being and material satisfaction become his priority? And so with us, once we decide to live for ourselves, and not for God, we find ourselves in the most barren of deserts, alone, lost and without direction or purpose.

In response to the devil Jesus quotes the Book of Deuteronomy: "man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." When we put our relationship with God first, then everything else falls into its proper perspective and gives life its meaning.

The second temptation has the devil taking Jesus to the top of the temple in Jerusalem. The devil is crafty and knows his Bible. He tells Jesus to throw himself down from the top quoting Psalm 91: "for He will command his angels to protect

you, and on their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.”

The Temple was the place of greatest importance, the centre of Jewish life. What great glory and adulation Jesus could receive were he to jump and have everyone see God’s angels descend to protect him.

To be motivated by vain glory serves no-one but oneself. Imagine the battlefield where the general has little concern for his soldiers or King and country but is preoccupied with his own derring-do and his glorious depiction in history. Worldly glory honour and power were at Jesus’ fingertips, there for the taking, but instead he emptied himself of such aims and desires, not putting His Heavenly Father to the test but submitting to His will and in so doing showing us a way to true glory, the glory of living as God’s children.

As for the **last temptation**, the devil takes Jesus even higher, to a very high mountain. Surveying all the kingdoms of the world the devil says: “All of these I will give you if you will fall down and worship me”. The temptation is not to worship the devil, it is for power, to ‘do it my way’.

We can’t take control of the world, even if we think we could do something positive for it. But aren’t we tempted to take control of our little corner of it? I am sure at times we all think we know how to fix our family, our friends, our workplace. When we take control of our little corner of the world, instead of entrusting it to God, it never works out for us for a very simple reason: unlike God, we don’t see the big picture. Returning to the image of the battlefield, if we all assumed power to give orders and attend only to the skirmishes we were caught up in then the wider fight would become uncoordinated and chaotic descending into inevitable defeat. But the picture is far bigger, so I need to trust a higher power, someone who does see the big picture. Jesus’ response that we should serve God alone reminds us that any power we have is the power to serve and to do the Father’s will.

During this time of Lent give some thought to how much your life is taken up with pleasure seeking, turning stones into bread as it were; how concerned you are about how others see you and how intent you might be to always do things “my way”? We are baptised for action, the doing of God’s will, and we must prepare for battle. Lent is a time for us all to shape up and ready ourselves for the victory of Easter.

With every good wish for a blessed Lent.

+Paul