



Lent - Going into the Desert with Jesus

Jesus had just been baptized. The Spirit led Him into the desert *“to be tempted”*. It was not an accident the devil showed up. This was a show down! If Jesus fails, if Jesus sins, salvation would be lost forever. *“By the solemn forty days of Lent the Church unites herself each year to the mystery of Jesus in the desert.”* (Catholic Catechism, 540). Let’s discover the mystery of the desert and how we can be united with our Lord this Lent.

The desert is a place of solitude. A place to get away from everything and encounter God. The Israelites, Abraham, Moses, David and even John the Baptist encountered God in the desert before their missions. Like all the prophets before Him, it was time for Jesus to go into the desert to prepare.

Jesus prepared for battle by fasting 40 days. Fasting is more than just “giving up” something. Authentic fasting is *“sharing your bread with the hungry, bringing the afflicted into your house, clothing the naked...then you shall call, and the LORD will answer”* (Isaiah 58:6-9) When food is sacrificed, we give to the poor. When online or phone time is sacrificed, we spend the extra time in prayer. We trade worldly for spiritual.

The devil was patient and waited for Jesus to be weak from fasting. First, a setup...*“If you are the Son of God”*. The devil questions the divinity of Jesus and gives Jesus something to prove. Then, *“command these stones become loaves of bread”*. The enemy strikes Jesus where He is weak and tempts Jesus to use God’s gifts to fulfill the flesh. Our temptations often start with doubt...*“If God really loves you”* or *“Is it really a sin”*. Then, temptation strikes where we are weak. Jesus stood on the Word of God to resist sin. We unite to Jesus during Lent by recognizing our temptations to sin, casting out doubt and standing on the Word of God.

Round two. Same setup...doubt. *“If you are the Son of God”*. Jesus did not respond the first time, so try again. Then, *“Throw yourself down, for it written”*. The devil uses the Word of God against Jesus. Jesus is tempted to interpret Scripture and presume upon God’s mercy. If Jesus had accepted the devil’s interpretation of Scripture, He might have jumped to His death and ended all hope of salvation. We unite to Jesus by being cautious not to interpret Scripture on our own. We need the Church’s fullness of understanding to guide us and keep us safe.

Round three. The tempter needed a new strategy. First, a lie *“All these I shall give to you”*. The devil did not own the world, it was not his to give. But still, the lure of power, fortune and fame might do the trick. Then, *“prostrate yourself and worship me”*. The world is full of so many potential idols that can come before God. Jesus was stripped of everything at the cross when He could have had everything. We unite to Jesus by casting out all the idols in our life, all the things we put before the Lord and before the Mass. We worship only the Lord our God above all things.

The devil departed *“for a time”*. This was not the end of temptation, only the beginning. When our Lent is over, we should be like Jesus...stronger in faith and more powerful to resist sin. We should also keep in mind that our temptations will never end and we will need to stay on guard.

“Lent is a fitting time for self-denial; we would do well to ask ourselves what we can give up in order to help and enrich others by our own poverty. Let us not forget that real poverty hurts: no self-denial is real without this dimension of penance.” – Pope Francis

Meditation:

- What does uniting my life to Jesus in the desert really mean to me? How can I be more united to Jesus?
- How can I make Lent more meaningful by feeding the hungry, clothing the poor and comforting the sick?
- What areas of my life are hardest to sacrifice? Can I spend 40 days in self-denial of those for Jesus?
- Can my 40 days of Lent prepare me, like Jesus, for a public ministry to make disciples of the world?