

Homily of First Sunday of Lent, Year C, 2025

Deuteronomy 26:4-10; Psalm 91:1-2, 10-13; Romans 10:8-13; Luke 4:1-13

Let us begin this homily with a summary of Pope Francis' 2025 Lenten Message. He titles the message, "Let Us Journey Together in Hope." First, Pope Francis calls us to conversion by challenging us to ask ourselves, "Am I really on a journey, or am I standing still, not moving, either immobilized by fear and hopelessness or reluctant to move out of my comfort zone? Am I seeking ways to leave behind the occasions of sin and situations that degrade my dignity?" Second, the Pope calls us "to work together ... to walk at the side of others, and never as lone travelers. ..." The Pope explains, "It means walking side-by-side, without shoving or stepping on others, without envy or hypocrisy, without letting anyone be left behind or excluded. Let us all walk in the same direction, tending towards the same goal, attentive to one another in love and patience." Third, Pope Francis urges us to "journey together in hope." He says, "May the hope that does not disappoint (Romans 5:5), the central message of the Jubilee be the focus of our Lenten journey towards the victory of Easter."

Moses did not reach the Promised Land. However, he set for the Israelites laws and directives they were to keep in the Promised Land that would guide their relationship with God and with one another. The first reading was a pronouncement to be made during the feast of harvest thanksgiving. The pronouncement summarizes Israel's history and journey with God, from their ancestors to their settling in the Promised Land. The offering of the first fruits from one's farm and the pronouncement were an expression of gratitude to God for his blessings. The reading encourages us to be grateful to God for his love and mercy, and to express our gratitude practically by offering to the Church of God from the blessings we have received.

On offering to the Church, Sirach 35:6-13 says, "Do not appear before the Lord empty-handed, for all that you offer is in fulfillment of the precepts. The offering of the just enriches the altar: a sweet odor before the Most High. The sacrifice of the just is accepted, never to be forgotten. With a generous spirit pay homage to the Lord, and do not spare your freewill gifts. With each contribution show a cheerful countenance and pay your tithes in a spirit of joy. Give to the Most High as he has given to you, generously, according to your means. For he is a God who always repays and will give back to you sevenfold." The Church uses the offerings to serve humanity, carry out the work of evangelization, and build up God's kingdom here on earth.

The devil does not want us to have a good relationship with God. He comes with all kinds of temptations to draw us away from God. The gospel story of the temptation of Jesus by the devil shows us some of the subtle ways the devil tempts us. The first temptation shows us that the devil tempts us through our desires, to seek and acquire our desires through improper means (turn stone to bread). The second temptation shows us that the devil tempts us to worship worldly things, or derive power and fame from them rather than from God ("I shall give you all this power and glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish"). The third temptation shows how the devil tempts us to engage in harmful and dangerous ambitious activities with concealed disastrous consequences (throw yourself down from the pinnacle of the temple and expecting angels to catch you).

The three temptations can be summarized as ungodly quests for wealth, for power, and for miracle. Jesus teaches us that when we put God aside and pursue wealth, power, and miracle, we become agents and tools of the devil.

If the devil tempted Jesus, who is God, he will tempt us more who are mere human beings. In the Book of Job, “The Lord said to Satan, ‘Where have you been?’ Then the Satan answered ... ‘Roaming the earth and patrolling it’” (Job 2:2). This is why 1 John 5:19 warns, “We know that we are children of God, [but] the whole world is under the control [constant attack] of the evil one.” 1 Peter 5:8-9 also warns, “Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith...” St. Augustine encourages us where he writes, “Our pilgrim life here on earth cannot be without temptation, for it is through temptation that we make progress, and it is only by being tempted that we come to know ourselves.” The following words from the second reading are very encouraging, “No one who believes in [Jesus] will be put to shame... For every one who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved” (Romans 10:11, 13). Hebrews 2:18 assures us, “Because he himself was tempted through what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tempted.” In Jesus, we triumph over every temptation as he himself did.

I wish you all a spirit-filled and fruitful Lenten season.

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