

# Lead Us Not Into Temptation

*A sermon for the First Sunday in Lent, 2025*

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*Temptation and sin are a tricky business. Their effects last well beyond the encounter with the tempter and prompt us to examine just where our hearts, love, and devotion are placed.*

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Lent has its origin in a time of preparation. It is the season in which those who hope to be baptized at Easter are received into the Church as catechumens, and when the already-baptized remind themselves of what their Christian calling is all about. Forty days of intense self-examination, reflection, prayer, and discipline to help us all focus on our relationship with God and ready ourselves for the power of Holy Week and Easter.

The encounter described in today's Gospel passage is an important revelation about the nature of Jesus, and the realities of temptation and sin. Jesus is the pattern for our lives as Christians and both scripture and our tradition acknowledge that we are constantly wrestling with temptation and sin. Today's passage is an important one for all of us to consider with care.

As ever, it is important to remember what has come before this passage. Jesus heads to the wilderness, full of the Spirit, immediately from his baptism in the Jordan. He has been identified publicly as the Son of God and his ministry begins in earnest. Jesus knows that a time of preparation will be important, and the Spirit is leading him to a place where he can prepare appropriately. The Spirit is also leading him to a place where he will be tempted and

tested as he prepares. This progression of baptism to readying for ministry with trials along the way is an important reminder to those who wish to be baptized and to those of us who have already passed through the water with Christ.

The tempter waits for an opportune moment.<sup>1</sup> He comes not when Jesus is fresh from the Jordan, but when he is weak and tired and famished. He forces nothing on Jesus, but does tempt him with some of the things that he wants most at that moment. Very seldom does the opportunity to sin present itself as sin for sin's sake. Much more likely, it will be framed as a decision that we know isn't quite right, but is easy to rationalize in the circumstances. A bit of petty theft from work because, after all, they owe me for that extra time I stayed last month. Turning stones to bread to end the fast early because it would be so easy and convenient and, out here in the wilderness, who would ever know?

Sin, so often, presents itself as a possible solution to a real problem, or a comfort when in pain. Not real healing, but an avoidance. Not real reparation and reconciliation, but a convenient bypass. Temptation presents good things, but the question we must ask ourselves is always "What is the right way to achieve these goals? What sort of authority is presenting these good things? What sort of authority do I worship?" Jesus feeds hungry people and, in the feeding of the multitude, we see him multiply bread and fish in a miraculous way. How is this ministry and miracle different from what the tempter suggests of him in the wilderness? In the feeding of the multitude, Jesus insists that the miracle include and model interdependence. The food is collected by the disciples and brought to

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<sup>1</sup>When rebuffed here, the devil bides time until another opportunity presents itself. Luke 22:3

Jesus who blesses it and then orders its distribution. It is in gathering what is available, offering it to God, and sharing it with the community that the miracle is made real. It is a cooperative effort. To look for a single miracle-worker who will provide without insisting on cooperation and recognition of interdependence, is to look for a dictator.

Temptation is a difficult experience for us. There is the immediate issue of working to resist temptation when we are faced with it. But it also dredges up deeper questions for us. Where do we put our trust, ultimately? On what foundation does our hope rest? Do we believe as we say we do about our God? After all, we know who our gods are by examining the objects of our worship.

Temptation will always appeal to our vulnerabilities. The specifics are different for each of us, but we humans have some nearly universal foibles. Tragically, these weaknesses are closely related to genuine needs that we should not be ashamed of trying to meet. Our love of pleasure, our love of possessions, and our love of affirmation are all vulnerabilities.

Pleasure is not bad. God gave us bodies and senses so that we could understand, explore, and enjoy this creation. Possessions are not bad. We need many things to survive in this world. Clothes, shelter, medicine, food, and the means to make these things are all critical for us. Affirmation is not bad. We reinforce our relationships with one another by affirming each other. We appreciate one another and express our appreciation in affirming words and actions. Where these loves of ours become occasions for temptation and sin is when we engage them in ways that do not reflect the intent of the one who gave us these faculties. God's miracles are works of healing and care that emphasize mu-

tual support and interdependence. So, when we engage our love of pleasure entirely through self-interest and convenience, or we seek affirmation in the form of power and glory gained by the false worship of others, or when we look for invulnerability, self-importance, and entitlement through possessions, or, worst of all, when we turn our neighbours into objects to be used in these pursuits, here it is that we've run afoul of the sin lurking at our door.<sup>2</sup>

Temptation is patient and persistent, waiting for the moments when we are tired, hungry, and weak to present its most appealing offers. We are assured again and again in the Bible and reinforced through our own experience that we will not avoid temptation every time. But, as we journey toward Jerusalem and Easter resurrection, we are reminded that, with God's help and the example of Jesus, we are able to resist. Our hope is in the teaching of God's word, the work we share in understanding that teaching, and that critical, humbling baptismal promise: Will you persevere in resisting evil and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord? We will, with God's help. Thanks be to God.

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<sup>2</sup>Genesis 4:7