

**February 14, 2016**  
**First Sunday of Lent**  
**Luke 4:1-13**

1 Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert 2 for forty days, to be tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and when they were over he was hungry. 3 The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." 4 Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'"

5 Then he took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a single instant. 6 The devil said to him, "I shall give to you all this power and their glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I may give it to whomever I wish. 7 All this will be yours, if you worship me." 8 Jesus said to him in reply, "It is written: 'You shall worship the Lord, your God, and him alone shall you serve.'"

9 Then he led him to Jerusalem, made him stand on the parapet of the temple, and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, 10 for it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,' and: 11 'With their hands they will support you, lest you dash your foot against a stone.'" 12 Jesus said to him in reply, "It also says, 'You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.'"

13 When the devil had finished every temptation, he departed from him for a time.

### **Background**

Luke ends his description of the Baptism of Jesus with the voice of God proclaiming: "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." (Luke 3:22) People of Jesus' culture would assume that such a statement would have been heard throughout the spirit world. They believed that numerous evil spirits roamed about creating as much havoc on human beings as possible. In the first verses of the Book of Job, the dialogue between Satan and God illustrates the thinking of the ancient peoples regarding the role of evil spirits in their world:

"One day, when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, Satan also came among them. And the LORD said to Satan, "Whence do you come?" Then Satan answered the LORD and said, "From roaming the earth and patrolling it." And the LORD said to Satan, "Have you noticed my servant Job, and that there is no one on earth like him, blameless and upright, fearing God and avoiding evil?" But Satan answered the LORD and said, "Is it for nothing that Job is God-fearing? Have you not surrounded him and his family and all that he has with your protection? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his livestock are spread over the land. But now put forth your hand and touch anything that he has, and surely he will blaspheme you to your face." (Job 1:6-11)

These ancient people would expect that the evil spirits would respond to God's statement of confidence and delight in Jesus, taking it as a challenge to see if Jesus is truly the person God has claimed. Secondly, if the evil spirits convince Jesus to do something that would cause him to forfeit his favor with God, the spirits would be victorious.

In addition, because the people believed that numerous evil spirits roamed the earth looking for people to torment, temptations were understood to be an expected part of normal life. The temptations themselves can be understood as an attempt by the devil to get Jesus to use power in a way that aligns him with certain groups of people. Rejecting the use of power aligns Jesus with other groups of people.



Mount of Temptation just outside of Jericho, Palestinian Territory, Israel – photo: Bro. Alan

Luke is setting the stage for the rest of Jesus' ministry by recounting the choices Jesus makes. He also parallels the temptations to the experiences of the Jews during their sojourn in the desert.

Much as the Jews hungered for bread, Jesus is described as hungry from fasting. The Jews complained against Yahweh, suggesting that he brought them out into the desert only to starve. Jesus remains faithful and hungry rather than be tempted to use his divine power to change stones to bread. The general belief was that when the Messiah appeared, the evil spirits that roamed the earth would be brought into submission. The second temptation is to bring the power of evil into submission if Jesus worships Satan. In the last temptation, Jesus is tempted in such a way as to force God to reveal God's plan and desire. The thinking is that if Jesus threw himself off the roof, the Father must save him. But Jesus surrenders himself to the will of his Father. Through all three temptations, Jesus is never seduced into doubting the Father's love for him. Jesus accepts his circumstance and places his complete trust in the Father.

Luke ends his account with the suggestion that the tempter left Jesus, but will look for another opportunity to return. That opportunity will come at the crucifixion. By placing the last temptation at the temple in Jerusalem, Luke has laid the groundwork for his community to make the connection to the cross.

### Reflection Questions

1. Do you ever pray for you or for those you love to be free of hardship, suffering, or struggle?
2. What is the source of your greatest temptation? Do you ever consider that the Holy Spirit might be leading you into that temptation?
3. Do you know people who have dealt with temptation in their life in ways that you admire? Why did their actions affect you that way?
4. What happens within you during periods of temptation that does not happen in periods of spiritual tranquility?
5. Why do you think we begin every Lent with a gospel reading that focuses on Jesus being tempted?
6. Jesus is tempted to use the power of God to satisfy his hunger, to bring the power of evil into submission, and to make manifest the power of God. Why do you think Jesus refuses to do these things?
7. When you reflect on your life and the choices you have made, with which groups of people do your choices align?
8. Do you tend to think of your Lenten practice more in terms of your power over temptation, or as an opportunity to strip away distraction to enter more fully into God's space and time?

Reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel.

